



## One Bike at a Time. One Hero at a Time. Introducing our Fifth Veteran to Receive a Harley:

“Thank you for making my dad smile again.” — Paige, proud daughter of our next recipient,  
**Retired Army Sergeant First Class Jon Vandeyacht of Omro, WI**

In 1991 Jon graduated high school in Kaukauna, WI and, wanting to be a part of something bigger, enlisted in the Army. One year in as an Infantryman, an injury redirected his path. He was discharged, worked, took classes and joined the Army Reserves for six years. His contract was ending when September 11 changed our world, and Jon’s life: he couldn’t watch others deploy without doing something himself, and reenlisted in 2002.

Jon then served in the Army’s Airborne Division in many different support roles the next 11 years. He deployed to Iraq three times as a Chemical Operations Specialist and later transitioned as a Civil Affairs Specialist. Earning six Army Commendation Medals and a long list of military achievements and recognitions along the way, he also completed his B.S. in Criminal Justice while deployed. He’s had his share of violence, gunfire, missions and deep personal loss. In 2003, his picture and name were nationally televised as a casualty when two U.S. Blackhawk helicopters collided under enemy gunfire. A last minute roster switch saved Jon’s life, but took that of 17 Brothers. And he went back. He faced the daily demands of living amidst danger and training for threats in unimaginable conditions, and stayed in despite the injuries incurred. Jon had found his passion in service and, with another deployment on the books, fully intended to see his military career out to retirement... until 2012 when a distracted driver hit Jon on base, totaling his motorcycle and ending his military career with a medical discharge. As he told his wife, “My bike is broken, just like I am.”

Every day his body reminds him of his time in service and the injuries that left him 100% disabled. Cumulative years of parachuting dotted with bad jumps, special operations combatives, blasts and exposures took their physical toll. Degenerative disc disease affects his entire spine and damaged hips and knees compromise his activity and strength. Headaches from Traumatic Brain Injuries and facial fractures plague him daily. Desert conditions and environmental hazards left him with asthma and sleep apnea. And while survivors guilt, anger and searing memories gnaw at his emotional capacity, it’s his involved and compassionate heart that allow him to persevere.

Frustrated with medical retirement, Jon wasn’t about to sit around. He chooses to fight through his pain and finds ways to continue serving his Country. He is currently a County Veterans Service Officer for Green Lake County, helping Veterans and families secure benefits and resources. He’s also an active member and Service Officer within Wisconsin’s American Legion District 6 leadership. His family is an obvious source of pride for Jon. Married 17 years, his wife Mary, a Navy Veteran, is a rock of support with a heart of gold. Their daughter Paige, 15, is just like her mother with a maturity beyond her years. Together their family organizes holiday relief deliveries for struggling Veterans and help provide equine therapy for Veterans and others with challenges. And while Jon’s positive outlook and involved days help get him through life, there’s still a gaping hole where his Bike used to be.

In over 20 years of riding with 5 different bikes, a wife who rides and a daughter who shared Dad’s backseat...riding is in Jon’s blood. He last borrowed a bike two years ago to help him find his “Zen place” and struggled with the two wheels. A modest lifestyle of making ends meet and sharing with others leaves little for anything but the basics, let alone the three-wheeled Bike he physically needed to safely return to the road. He shared his story and dream with us and described his passion in words only a true biker would understand. We understood...and felt it was time Jon received a little of the goodwill he fosters and plug the gaping hole in his heart.

This once in a lifetime ride—an exceptional 1998 H-D Electra Glide & matching H-D Side Car with less than 5,000 miles—was donated to Hogs For Heroes by Scott Panzer, of Connecticut, with the request we find an injured Veteran rider to love her. Done. Jon will receive his keys at a celebration hosted by our friends at Harley-Davidson of Madison who not only generously stored the Bike, they got her road ready. Please join us **Saturday, May 5 at H-D of Madison, from 11:30-2, with the Ceremony at 12:30**, as we honor Jon and express our gratitude for all of our Veterans.

