



## Introducing Our 14th Veteran Recipient:

### Sergeant First Class Army Veteran Todd Richter of Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Todd Richter moved to Sheboygan, WI at age 13 and spent the rest of his life making that community his home base. He grew up dreaming of becoming a firefighter and helping people. But as senior year rolled around, he realized he wasn't ready for college and unsure of his future path. He knew, however, he wanted to be a part of something larger in life and, attracted to the benefits of college tuition and home ownership, he enlisted in the Army Reserves. He left for boot camp right after graduation, "a cocky, know it all kid", and quickly learned he knew nothing. In the midst of figuring out his direction, a life of service found him and kept him serving our Country for the next 22 years...and then some. And while he did his best to balance service with life on the home front, the weight of PTSD eventually tipped the scale of fortune against him.

A diesel mechanic during his six years in the Army Reserves, Todd worked convoy detail and did two tours to Germany. He took technical firefighting classes in-between assignments and worked several part time jobs to make ends meet. He married and had two beautiful daughters fill his life and heart; but wanting further challenge, he joined the Navy for four years of active duty. Assigned to a nuclear aircraft carrier as a Fireman, specializing in nuclear welding, he spent more than half of those years circling the Persian Gulf on two different tours. As his contract neared completion, Todd realized his military career was where he drew his personal comfort and confidence from, and decided to pursue retirement in the military he loved.

He transitioned to the Army National Guard for the next 12 years and simultaneously took a job as a Corrections Officer with the Sheboygan Sheriff's Office. It was during this time that Todd racked up three deployments in the Middle East: two in Iraq and a third in Afghanistan. In 2006, and within 24 hours of first arriving in Iraq, a Brother was killed in action. Todd had never been more scared in his life and, to this day, he honors his memory by wearing his Brothers name on his wrist. Haunting him further is the IED attack on the convoy he lead and managed. His injured Brothers miraculously survived, but Todd further suppressed the pain and guilt inflicted...and unknowingly fed the PTSD growing within. The inner turmoil grew stronger as he returned to Iraq in 2009 to work Detainee Security. Conditions were volatile: insurgents, gunfire and explosions were an every day occurrence. An incident on base rendered him unconscious for 24 hours and left him with a Traumatic Brain Injury that affects his memory today and a painful scar to remind him of what he still can't remember. Yet he continued serving: racking up unimaginable experiences and suppressing emotions that fueled his demons within. It was during this deployment that Todd was awarded the Bronze Star, though he modestly dismisses the details as simply "being in the wrong place at the right time." Returning home and readjusting to civilian life and personal interactions became increasingly difficult. Todd tried to forget the memories and push away the anger, fear and hypervigilance. Plagued by nightmares and apnea, sleep became even more difficult. His marriage strained under pressure and Todd felt less like the father he wanted to be, further adding to his personal turmoil. He began drinking excessively to self-medicate, mask his struggles and avoid the conflicts he faced. And then, in 2013, he deployed again: this time to Afghanistan where he worked in Field Artillery. While there he took online college classes preparing for his 2016 retirement and civilian life... only to face divorce upon returning and the devastating losses that come with it. Todd grew more volatile and reclusive, avoiding gatherings and people. He mourned his loss of service and the identity and family that came with it. He blamed others for his struggles and spiraled further in the grips of alcohol and haunting demons he wasn't ready to admit existed. He became a man he didn't recognize nor like...until one day life clicked for him and he wanted more for himself. He bravely chose to fight and seek the care he desperately needed, and has continued doing so ever since.

It was about this same time he took a job as an Assistant County Veterans Service Officer in Sheboygan County and realized his ability to further serve his Country by assisting Veterans. Helping others was all he

really ever wanted to do and he loves working with, and for, his Brothers and Sisters in Arms. He graduated in 2017 with a Bachelors Degree in Communications and now enjoys public speaking. His daughters have always meant the world to him: he's worked hard to rebuild those relationships and proudly supports their next life chapters. As he took control of his life, he reconnected with his high school sweetheart. They married in 2019 and blended families to bring more love into the lives of all. And in line with his life-long dream, he finally became a volunteer firefighter with the Town of Wilson. Throughout his life journey many people and opportunities supported his change, but it was the opportunity to ride his motorcycle that completely soothed his soul.

A rider for 26 years, Todd fully knows the value of wind therapy. Throughout his military career riding gave him a release, control, and joy. Now a District 2 American Legion Rider, Todd's gained even more in his riding brotherhood. Unfortunately, his 13 year old Yamaha's improvements cost more than his bike is worth, making his ability to stay on the healing road unpredictable and depressing. The depleting toll of divorce, raising two families and rebuilding savings leaves little for extraordinary purchases for himself, let alone a Harley he's barely let himself dream of. Hogs For Heroes felt that Todd, who faithfully served for 22 years and, despite being 90% disabled with his own PTSD struggles, works every day further serving our Veterans...needed a ride that dependably carried him forward to do more good for both himself and others.

We surprised Todd with our news and, via online shopping, he found his love six hours after the shock of being selected. He sent us a picture saying, "this is the one"...and a beautiful one she is. Harbor Town Harley-Davidson in Manitowoc was phenomenal in making this dealership demo, a 2019 Street Glide with 3,000 miles on her, a reality for Todd. In a stunning Kinetic Green, not only does the color remind him of his beloved Army green, it reflects his Packer devotion as well. Unique to this bike, it has been generously paid for by the amazing donations from Wisconsin's International Union of Operating Engineers Local 139. We couldn't be more honored by the beautiful support the IUOE 139 has given our mission these past four years and personally love that the bike Todd chose has gold detail, coincidentally honoring their Union color.

A VFW life member, Todd's Post 9156 jumped at the chance to host his gifting on Saturday, July 11, 2020. Ride over with friends and hang with us from 11:00 am - 1:30 pm. His "Presentation of Keys Ceremony" will start promptly at 11:30 am. The VFW will open their bar at noon and offer a donation lunch with proceeds benefitting Hogs For Heroes following the ceremony. Please join us as celebrate and honor the gratitude we have for all Veterans and welcome this Veteran back to the road on his first Harley-Davidson!

Please note: During these times of COVID 19 uncertainty, please know our event will be outdoors, encouraging responsible personal actions and distancing to enhance the safety of those choosing to attend this gathering. In case of bad weather, however, we'll move the event into the Post's banquet hall.