

Help a Hero Scholarship Hits \$12 Million Mark in 10 Years

This fall, VFW and Sport Clips are celebrating the 10th anniversary of their joint scholarship program

Nov 27, 2023

Ed Tjaden's journey from serving with the 2nd Bde., 1st Armd. Div., in Iraq in 2008 to becoming an attorney in the St. Louis, Missouri, area was helped, in part, by VFW's Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship.

"If it weren't for you guys, we wouldn't be where we are," Tjaden said in 2018 prior to graduating from law school. "I just can't say enough good things. VFW transformed my law school experience."

Student veteran Abbey Berg has a similar sentiment. She has served with the Air National Guard based out of the 133rd Airlift Wing in St. Paul, Minnesota, since 2019.

In her third year studying nursing at Bethel University in St. Paul, Berg was awarded a \$5,000 VFW Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship for the current semester.

Her husband, an Air Force veteran, told her about the scholarship after he previously received one.

"He opened my eyes to it," said Berg, who deployed to Al Udeid Air Force Base in Doha, Qatar, with the 8EAMS Squadron in 2021. "I plan to pursue a master's in nurse-midwifery at Bethel, which is a 10-month program. After that, I would like to get a job as a nurse-midwife."

Berg and Tjaden are two of the nearly 2,600 veterans supported by VFW's Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship since 2013. In the past 10 years, more than \$12 million has been awarded to veterans and service members wanting to further their education. The program provides scholarships to active-duty troops and veterans to attend college or trade schools.

"To have the opportunity to hear from our student veterans across the world has been

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inspiring,” VFW Programs Director Lynn Rolf said. “We have a chance to shape the country much like the WWII generation did. Our veterans achieving educational success towards their goals to better themselves and our country will indeed leave a mark on our society for generations.”

SCHOLARSHIP IS ‘LIFE-CHANGING’

The partnership between VFW and Sport Clips began long before 2013. In 2007, Sport Clips became the “Official Haircutter of the VFW” and thus began their support of VFW’s Operation Uplink Free Call Days, offering free phone calls home to deployed troops. Once troops began returning from Iraq and Afghanistan in large numbers, there was not the demand for Free Call Days. That is when the Help a Hero Scholarship program was born.

“When we launched the Help A Hero Scholarship program in 2013 in partnership with the VFW, we had been supporting phone calls home for active-duty service members since 2007, but we knew we wanted to do more for veterans and their families,” Gordon Logan, Air Force veteran, VFW life member and founder and chairman of SportClips said. “We believed this scholarship would be impactful, and we quickly realized how life-changing it was for these recipients. For so many, it was the difference between staying in school and completing their degree or abandoning their educational dreams. I look forward to the impact this program will continue to have on our nation’s heroes.”

For seven consecutive years, Sport Clips has donated at least \$1 million to the program, which awards up to \$5,000 of assistance per semester, per family for service members and veterans

in the rank of E-5 and below.

“Sport Clips has brought new meaning to the phrase, ‘Help a Hero,’” VFW Foundation Director Lisa Baronio said.

“Sport Clips understands the needs of veterans and how to change their lives and the lives of their families.”

The most recent Sport Clips donation of \$1.5 million in January included \$143,000 from Sport Clips franchises. Nearly half of that amount came directly from haircut proceeds on Veterans Day 2022, while Sport Clips clients donated the most generous portion of money raised in stores and online.

“The VFW is amazed at the generosity of Sport Clips clients, its team members and its partners,” VFW Adjutant General Dan West said. “It is their kindness and eagerness to support America’s veterans that makes this scholarship program possible.”

To celebrate 10 years of Help a Hero, a LinkedIn group page is being created to help connect past and current scholarship recipients.

Additionally, upcoming golf tournament fundraisers in North Carolina, Colorado, Arizona and Wisconsin will be hosted by Sport Clips team leaders.

“We are positioning ourselves, with the help of Sport Clips, as the organization everyone looks to as the standard bearer and example to look to,” Rolf said. “I see us in the future as the team that made an incredible impact. We are capturing stories now of how the veterans benefited, and I cannot wait to see what they do for our country.”

For more information, go to <https://www.SportClips.com/hero> or <https://www.vfw.org/Scholarship>.