



ALLMAN FAMILY HEALS IN MONTANA

Alex was a spirited and joyful 4-year-old girl growing up in Charlotte, North Carolina. She was sassy, funny, and full of smiles! One day, she developed a strange rash, so her Mom and Dad took Alex to the doctor. After examination, the doctor noticed that her stomach was abnormally big, and suggested to have further tests run to make sure everything was okay. Of course, Mom and Dad thought the swollen belly was from a good appetite! After going in for further scans, doctors concluded that it wasn't simply from too many pancakes, it was a Wilms' tumor in her right kidney... cancer. Fortunately, it was caught at Stage I. Usually, this type of cancer is very treatable. The doctors quickly re-

moved the kidney with the tumor and started her on the standard chemo treatment.

After finishing Alex's chemo treatment, her parents were overjoyed! They thought their battle with the horrible disease was over. As they were busy planning her celebration for beating the cancer, Alex went back in for final CT scans. The results floored everyone, including her doctors. Not only was the cancer still in her system, but it had spread to her lungs. She was now Stage IV. Everyone was stunned and saddened to say the least. No one really knew why and what to do next. In light of the additional diagnosis, Alex started a new, harsher chemo protocol, where she was in and out of the hospital

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for days on end and receiving radiation at St. Jude in Memphis. To make matters worse, after a year of Covid, her family had to isolate from (what felt like) the whole world because Alex's immune system was almost non-existent.

After a long and grueling 5 months of this new treatment protocol, her body was cleared of cancer! She continued



ued on chemo to kill any remaining cancerous cells. Alex finished all treatment in July of 2022, then went back to the doctors for some more CT scans. Her and her whole family were overjoyed to finally have them be all clear! Although they did their best to safely have fun and keep her spirits up over the year and a half of treatment, their world felt extremely small. Their world (and family) got a whole

lot larger when they were invited on a Big Hearts trip in the summer of 2022 at Upper Canyon Outfitters.

From August 13– 18, 2022, Alex and her family traveled to Montana to enjoy some much needed time away and family time. Alex was accompanied by her mom, Alicia, her dad, Jason, and her sister, Evangeline “Apple.” Their days were filled with glitter decorating horses, horseback riding, playing in the sun, hiking, fly fishing, duck racing, gold mining, and dress up! Through these fun Montana experiences with their family, the Allman family was able to escape and heal in a beautiful way.



Big Hearts Sponsors:

SITKA Gear

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A Year of Making a Difference



Nate Jensen from Westby, MT: (Oct. 20-24) Nate, along with his parents and brother, participated in an elk hunt on opening weekend. Nate is 20 years old and lives on the family farm. Having been born with spina bifida, Nate has undergone 11 surgeries and has been challenged by multiple medical issues.

Master Sgt Jesse Edinger from Helena, MT: (Oct. 20-24)

Jesse, along with his wife Sunwoo (Sun), his two daughters and one son, went on an elk hunt of a lifetime. For 20 years, Edinger has served his country proudly and has honored the lives of more than 1,000 Montana veterans. His wife, Sun also serves in the Montana Army National Guard.



Sgt Patrick Wickens is originally from Denton, MT but now lives in Florida: (Oct. 20-24)

Patrick was joined by his youngest son Carter, and his parents Keith and Judy from Denton, on an elk hunt of a lifetime. Wickens joined the US Army one month before the attacks of September 11. Wickens was struck by a rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) during an ambush near Mahmudiyah, Iraq and lost his right leg above the knee and lost his left leg at the hip. Getting around on a prosthetic leg and a crutch, Sgt Wickens collected a fine bull elk.

Ryan Newell from Billings, MT: (June 30- July 2) Ryan, who is 16 years old, was accompanied by his parents, Jesse and Jenny, and his two sisters, Hannah and Katelyn, on a bison hunt. Ryan was diagnosed with B-cell Leukemia in 2018, underwent a couple rounds of chemo, which he did not respond to due to a rare genetic mutation. His last hope was a bone marrow transplant, in which his sister, Hannah, was a 100% match.



Sartor Family from Payton, CO: (July 1-7) The Sartor family is the first Gold Star family to be served in the Big Heart's program. Dee (mom), Stryder (18), Grace (16) and Garrett (12) enjoyed a Bob Marshall Wilderness pack trip. Husband/father, Sgt Major Ryan Sartor, joined the Army in 2001 and earned a Green Beret. He went on to serve our country for 18 years and 12 deployments, receiving more than two dozen awards and decorations including a Purple Heart and Bronze Star with Valor.

Capital High Students Give Back

Perhaps one of the most under-credited backbones of the Big Hearts effort is Jim Weber and his Capital High School welding and machining classes. Jim (or as his students call him “Mr. Weber”) has been aiding the Big Hearts effort since 2015. After his class’s initial assistance to the Banquet/Auction, he has made it an annual thing! Every year not only does the whole class machine a custom fly rod to be auctioned off, but those in his Senior Welding and Machining classes each donate a custom welded item to the Big Hearts Banquet!

Jim attended college in Colorado, University of Montana Western and eventually the University of Montana. He taught at Helena Middle School for a while, until the position for a welding teacher opened up at Capital. Mr. Weber took the job on the condition that he could start a machining class along with it, and the rest is history.

When asked how Big Hearts has impacted his life, Mr. Weber said, “It’s truly a God thing... God bringing that into my life. It allows the students such a great opportunity to serve, to dive into a worthy cause, and to get behind something that changes lives...

It has had a huge impact on our program here at Capital High School.”

“They learn how to give of themselves for the benefit of others,” Weber said, “I have seen Big Hearts do some truly amazing work in the hearts of these young students.”

Hayden Hecker, a senior in Weber’s class, was the first Capital High student to have his item featured in the Live Auction at Big Hearts this year. In partnership with MOVE Bumpers, Hayden installed a custom bumper for the winner of the Live Auction item. Hecker said that, “Being involved in Big Hearts has shown me the joy of donating to a greater cause. Mr. Weber has introduced us students to this experience and I couldn’t be more grateful for being apart of his class.”



Fast Facts

- Big Hearts under the Big Sky was created in 2008 by Montana and Outfitters and Guides Association
- Big Hearts has served 87 families/groups totaling 465 people:
- Involving 47 MOGA Outfitter businesses
- Accounting for over \$1M in donated Montana Outdoor activities.
- 90% of the money donated is spent on putting those we serve in the field.
- Only fully licensed, professional outfitters deliver Big Hearts Trips

Big Hearts Staff:

Mac Minard—Executive Director
Kashia Herring—Executive Assistant
Celi Chapman—MOGA Intern

Nothing Would Be Possible Without:

Amazing Ambassadors
Wonderful Volunteers

For more information:

Visit: bigheartsmt.org

WE’VE MOVED!!

New Big Hearts under the Big Sky Location:
2021 11th Avenue, Ste. 12
Helena, MT 59601



Volunteer Spotlight: *Ken Homan*

Here at Big Hearts, there are so many amazing volunteers that it is difficult to choose just one. We are so grateful for all the time and dedication that is put into the Big Hearts mission. This year we are pleased to shine the volunteer spotlight on Ken Homan.

Ken owns a catering company in Helena and has been a volunteer at Big Hearts for many years. He first got involved in Big Hearts program through a bible study group led by Capital High School welding teacher, Jim Weber.

Since then, Ken has been a huge contributor to the Big Hearts banquet every year, as well as been an ambassador for five trips thus far! Ken's military background helps him connect, especially with those trip recipients with a military background. "I've been in combat. We might not all have had the same experience, but I understand where they are coming from," commented Ken about being an ambassador for various Big Hearts trips.

Ken thinks that the best part about being so involved with Big Hearts is having the opportunity to be part of the families' lives. "You get the opportunity to develop a relationship that will last a lifetime... these families and individuals become a part of your family and that's just pretty awesome."

Along with the extensive mental and physical injuries acquired by these veterans, Ken notes that the families have just as large of a role to play, and they need healing too. Another aspect of being an ambassador that Ken finds rewarding is the opportunity to be someone that the recipients can confide in. "You pick them up, you get to talking, and throughout their trip you just create this bond." He feels extensively that being involved in Big Hearts gives just as

much to the volunteers as it does to the trip recipients. "No matter how much you pour into it, you get just as much back. It's just so rewarding."

Ken also stays adamant that the ambassa-

sador and the recipient family aren't the only benefactors of these trips, but the outfitters are as well. "You develop relationships with the outfitters also, they are the ones that basically spend their time and money to give to this."

When asked how Big Hearts has benefitted him personally, Ken replied, "the closeness that you develop with Big Hearts as a whole is unmatched as well... other trip recipients that I haven't even met, I'll be praying for... Even though I don't know [them] personally, I still feel like I am apart of [their] live[s] through Big Hearts. We are all one big family."

He also adds how grateful the trip recipients are to be on the trips. "I think what would benefit anybody wanting to get involved, is just the smiles, and the hugs. They pour their hearts back into us. That's why Big Hearts is so successful, it isn't about anything but that individual and that family... there is no other organization like it."



A Letter From a 2022 Trip Recipient

Big Hearts Family-

I just want to take a minute to express my gratitude for everything you have done for my family and I. Working in the casualty assistance field, I realize how much work is done behind the scenes to make an event go off without a hitch. From our perspective everything was perfect! You are truly professionals who care deeply about your mission.

I was asked what the best part of the trip was and of course I said, "the elk hunt!" Thinking back now, however, I realized that it was the chance to meet some people who are truly generous and who know what selfless service is all about. Your organization has been an inspiration. The second best part of the trip was spending the best quality time with my son that I have ever had. Our relationship has been slipping lately but I feel that this experience has reinforced it and we are closer for it.

I could go on and on, but I think that you get the point. Just know that I am humbled to have been selected and was honored to be able to stand next to Nate and share the experience with him.

Your work is making a difference, keep it up!

~ Jesse and Family ~

Leave a Montana Legacy through Planned Giving

Planned giving provides you the opportunity to have a lasting and meaningful impact for years to come. During this season of giving, please consider including *Big Hearts under the Big Sky* in your charitable gifts. Your contribution will leave a legacy that will provide outdoor guided trips for military service men and women who provided extraordinary service and children who face life threatening illness for years to come.

There are multiple ways for you to be a part of Big Hearts:

Montana Endowment Tax Credit. Known as the Montana Endowment Tax Credit (METC) this gift option enables donors to pay less in Montana state income taxes when giving a planned gift to a qualified Montana charitable endowment. The year-end tax benefits from METC can be significant. Big Hearts under the Big Sky works closely with the Montana Community Foundation to manage your contributions to the endowment and ensure the right fit for each individual, family and organization's unique interests and financial circumstance.

Charitable Gift Annuity. With a charitable gift annuity, you make a gift of cash or appreciated property and the endowment pays you a fixed income for life. You receive an immediate charitable income tax deduction for the value of the gift. The remainder transitions to Big Hearts after you pass away as a gift in memory of you.

Did you know that Montana has one of the most attractive Endowment Tax Credits in the Nation?

Bequests. Remember Big Hearts under the Big Sky in your will or living trust with a gift that will live on. Many have found that including Big Hearts under the Big Sky as a beneficiary may help reduce tax liability for your family.

Gifts of Cash. Honor someone special to you with a cash donation in their name as an expression of love and respect that will last in perpetuity.

All gifts to Big Hearts under the Big Sky qualify as a tax deductible charitable donation.

For more information on leaving your legacy, please contact the Big Hearts office at (406) 449-3578



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The Impact of Giving

When *Big Hearts under the Big Sky* was conceived in 2008, we naively thought we would be the center of a wheel radiating good will. We quickly learned the families served by the Big Hearts program are the center and each spoke a means for others to give. We had inadvertently created a community based opportunity to give back, and we as Outfitters, are just a small part in that. Join us in giving back.



Plan your own Montana adventure!

Let one of our outfitters or guides show you the Montana adventure of your dreams!

www.montanaoutfitters.org/find-an-outfitter/

15th Annual Big Hearts Banquet Recap



With all of the support from donors, volunteers, and staff, the 2023 Big Hearts Banquet was a major success! Highlights included Jason Allman's testimony (Alex stealing the show often), Matt Duker's account of his trip experience, and T. Phillip Bowers' extraordinary ringman show. Thank you to all of the amazing people who made this years' Banquet and Auction possible!

We look forward to seeing you next year back in Helena on January 13th, 2024!





Big Hearts under the Big Sky
2021 11th Avenue, Ste. 12
Helena, MT 59601
moga@mt.net
Www.bigheartsmt.org
(406) 449-3578

How Can You Contribute?

For Big Hearts to be successful, it takes an army of volunteers. We count ourselves lucky to have such incredible people from near and far who help this organization touch the lives of men, women, and families from across the country. Volunteers are needed for the banquet, nominations for trips, as well as ambassadors for the trips.

Want to learn more? Email us at mogaoffice@mt.net

SAVE THE DATE

**BIG HEARTS UNDER THE BIG SKY BANQUET:
JANUARY 13, 2024 AT DELTA HOTELS
BY MARRIOTT HELENA COLONIAL IN HELENA!**