

Winter 2018/2019

Rest, reconnection and a family's first vacation together

When Big Hearts volunteer Martha Kesler imagines the quintessential Big Hearts family, she pictures people like Brad and Jerri Hrubes, an incredibly kind and generous couple who are more comfortable offering help than accepting it.

“Jerri and Brad are people who put their hearts out there like crazy,” Martha says. “They just give and give and give.” This past summer, the Hrubes had the opportunity to be on the receiving end of the goodwill they so readily spread. They were one of six families to receive a fully outfitted Montana outdoor adventure at no cost to the family.

Jerri and Brad, who have four grown biological children, opened their home and hearts to four more children. In 2009, they took in Christy and Roby, two siblings from Haiti whose adoptive parents brought them to the Hrubes to stay for a week or two and never returned.

The following year, a magnitude 7 earthquake in Haiti killed hundreds of thousands of people. Senator Jon Tester's staff contacted Brad and Jerri to see if they'd be interested in adopting



a 6-year-old girl named Sarah and her younger brother, Donaldson (DJ).

DJ was found under a pile of rubble during a body-recovery mission. Nearly 4 years old, he weighed 10 pounds and had serious health issues stemming from malnutrition and poor environmental conditions; Sarah weighed just 25 pounds. Orphaned by the earthquake, they had nowhere to go.

The Hrubes took them in to their home in Billings, and their family grew to in-

clude four adopted children and four biological children. “It's chaos and it's crazy, but we love it,” Jerri says.

Four years ago, DJ woke with blood coming out of his tear ducts. With DJ's vision rapidly deteriorating, Jerri began driving him to Salt Lake City for monthly treatments. Meanwhile, DJ's nurse in Billings recommended that they apply for a Big Hearts trip. Sarah Blackburn, a social worker at Billings Clinic, completed the family's

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Letter from Big Hearts 2018 Banquet Chair has been a great year!

With your support, Big Hearts under the Big Sky provided six families from across the country the opportunity to enjoy and heal in Montana's great outdoors. Big Hearts serves those who have provided extraordinary military service to our country and those who face the challenges of a life-threatening illness, at NO COST. This year, we have had recipients from as close as Helena, Montana, as far as Pensacola, Florida, and everywhere in between!

These efforts were only possible with your generous support. This year we saw tremendous success at the Greater Helena Gives fundraising event, where we raised more than any other participating nonprofit. Two stand-out contributions to this event deserve extra recognition: \$1,000 donated by the Capital High School welding and shop class, who raised that money by building bookends for the Capital High School library, and a \$5,000 contribution from an anonymous donor!

Last year's banquet and auction set a fundraising record, and we are setting out to break that record again this year. Big Hearts volunteers have been extremely busy soliciting sponsorships and donations for the night's festivities. The

donations we have already seen rolling through the door from our supporters are making my texting fingers itch to bid.

That said, we still need to put our shoulders to the wheel if we are going to make this banquet our best yet! Please...if there is a local business that you patronize, or an individual you think should become part of the Big Hearts family, ask them to donate an auction item. For more information contact Mac, Kashia, or Shannon at the MOGA office.

As always, we want to extend a big thank you to the volunteers, donors, and MOGA members who make this program happen. Join us in Bozeman, January 12, at the Big Hearts Banquet and help celebrate 11 years of service while we recommit ourselves to helping *Make a Difference One Family at a Time!*

From my Big Heart to Yours,

Rachel Kinkie Meredith

El Board Member and Banquet Chair

Fast Facts about Big Hearts under the Big Sky

1. We are a **Montana-based charity** that serves a national audience.

2. **90% of your cash donations** are spent putting those we serve out in the field on fully-outfitted Montana outdoor adventures

3. Only **fully-licensed, professional outfitters** deliver Big Hearts Trips.

4. Our **core values** are loyalty, integrity, enthusiasm, thoughtfulness, decisiveness, quality, compassion, family and spirituality.

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VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT: LAURA SCHULTZ AND PETE MINARD



Hometown: Broadview, MT
Current Residence: Helena, MT
Day Job: Certified Paralegal

Q: “Montana Heals” is one of Big Hearts’ founding concepts. What does that idea mean to you?

A: Growing up, my family did a lot

of camping, hunting, and fishing. Being in the mountains brings me back down to my roots and reminds me that the simple things in life matter the most. The genuine kindness of our neighbors and enthusiasm to give others these experiences also makes Montana healing. Big Hearts brings those same experiences to others.

Q: What volunteer activities are you currently involved in?

A: I assist Big Hearts with planning and executing the annual banquet and auction. I also volunteer at the Montana Talking Book Library, helping record audio books and magazines to Montana residents who are unable to use standard print materials. Lastly, I volunteer for St. Peter’s Hospital’s No One Dies Alone program, which provides comfort and a reassuring presence to those in their last days or hours of life.

Q: What’s your motivation for volunteering?

A: Holter, my oldest son, has always been my inspiration. From a very young age, he has given so much of his time to helping others and positively shaping his community. Watching my dad tirelessly help others with a smile has also shown me what kind of person I want to be. So much good can be shared between people. Even the smallest things, such as smiling at a stranger at the grocery store, can make a positive impact.

Q: What is your favorite part about the Big Hearts program?

A: I love seeing the positive effects of humanity, compassion, and generosity firsthand. We are all here to lift each other up and do whatever we can to give another family the best experience possible.



Hometown: Navy brat, everywhere
Current Residence: Ahsahka, ID
Day Job: Retired civil engineer

Q: Why did you decide to get involved with Big Hearts?

A: I’m a veteran and we grew up in

a military family, so what interested me at first was the connection to veterans. I’m also very interested in the things this program does for children. It’s a good program and a way to give back.

Q: What volunteer activities are you currently involved in?

A: I’m a Trip Ambassador for Big Hearts—that’s French for go’fer. I just completed my fourth year with the program. I’m also involved with my local church and I groom ski trails with the Palouse Divide Nordic Ski Club.

Q: You have a history of volunteering for multiple service organizations. Why do you volunteer?

A: My life’s been blessed and it’s an opportunity to give back. I want to serve the people who’ve served us, and help out people who may need a hand. I like that it’s beneficial for the families

that participate. The hunting gets to be a focus, but one of the things I try to do is get the whole family involved. To me, that’s the crux of what sets us apart from other programs for veterans.

Q: Do you have a favorite story or memory about the program?

A: There have been lots of good ones. A couple years ago, we had a couple who were both in the military. Michaela took a great big bull elk—probably the biggest one I’ve seen since I’ve been involved in the program—and a day later, her husband got one. The wife walked around it about two times, looked at it from every angle and said, ‘Oh that’s such a cute elk—I think we can mount that one in the bathroom.’ Shayne caught a lot of grief over that. There’s lots of fun stuff like that and I like seeing the families come together and seeing the kids blossoming and smiling.

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nomination and the Big Hearts Board of Directors swung into action.

At the time of his nomination, DJ was almost completely blind and had started learning braille. At school he struggled to adapt to his vision loss, but he maintained a friendly and joyful demeanor. "He's faced extensive challenges in his young years and has done so with a pure heart," Sarah wrote in her nomination letter.

July brought both good news and additional health struggles. About a month before the family's Big Hearts trip to western Montana, DJ underwent a successful cornea transplant that restored his vision. Around the same time, Brad received a colon cancer diagnosis and started undergoing treatment.

The trip gave the Hrubes an opportunity to reconnect with nature and one another while enjoying some firsts together. It was the first family vacation the six of them got to take together. Despite his Montana roots, it was Brad's first trip to Glacier. It was also the first time in a 4-year string of illnesses and traumatic injuries that Jerri was given the opportunity to relax, unwind, and be taken care of. "I'm real



grateful for that trip because I really haven't stopped being a caretaker since all of the tragedies started happening," Jerri says. "It still feels like a dream."

Martha is grateful she could help make that happen. "It was so nice to give them that sense of 'ahhhh, you can drop your shoulders and relax,'" she said of her role in the trip.

Although Martha has been heavily involved with Big Hearts since its inception, this was the first time she served as a trip ambassador. She developed a natural rapport with the family—DJ even took to calling her "Martha May" after a favorite character in Dr. Seuss classic "How the Grinch Stole Christmas."

Their trip was hosted by Swan Moun-

tain Outfitters out of Swan Lake. They rode horses, rafted the Middle Fork of the Flathead with Glacier Rafting Company, fished Flathead Lake with Howe's Fishing, and enjoyed a chuck wagon dinner complete with a singing cowboy poet. During the rafting trip, DJ, who had only recently regained his sight, spotted a bald eagle on the bank of the river.

Martha fondly recalls the kids' delight at encountering a llama named Popeye their first night at the ranch; it set the tone for the rest of their adventure. She also smiles when looking at a photo of DJ "all duded up" with a cowboy hat, boots and chaps.

Jerri grew up barrel racing and recognizes a budding love of horses in her youngest son. "DJ's very good at handling a horse... He really wants to get one and I hope to do that for him when everything calms down."

Martha and Jerri have kept in touch since the trip wrapped up in September, and Martha hopes to visit the Hrubes soon.

In characteristic form, Jerri wants to continue giving. She'd like to become a Big Hearts volunteer.

BIG HEARTS BY THE NUMBERS

Since 2008, we have:

served **70** Families

Totaling **406** people

Involving **47** MOGA outfitters

All adding up to over **\$500,000** in donated outdoor Montana adventures

“WE MAKE A LIVING BY WHAT WE GET. WE MAKE A LIFE BY WHAT WE GIVE.”
- WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

There are many ways to make an impact now—and for years to come—for Big Hearts trip recipients. One of the easiest ways to ensure that Big Hearts can continue providing outstanding trips at NO COST to these remarkable families is by making a gift to the Big Hearts Under the Big Sky endowment. You may find, as many others have, that you can minimize your taxes while maximizing your giving.

What if there was a way to get up to a \$10,000 credit on your taxes?

What if we told you that by getting this credit, you'd not only benefit yourself, but also Montana-based nonprofits and the people they serve? And what if we told you Montana is one of just a few states to offer a credit like this? The Montana Community Foundation, which works closely with Big Hearts to manage contributions to the Big Hearts under the Big Sky endowment, explains how this tax credit works:

WHAT IS THE MONTANA ENDOWMENT TAX CREDIT?

Formally known as Montana Charitable Endowment Tax Credit, this opportunity offers you a credit of 40% of a qualifying planned gift's federal charitable deduction, up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year, per individual. It also allows a credit of 20% of a gift's federal charitable deduction for a direct gift by a qualified business up to a maximum of \$10,000 per year.

WHAT IS A PLANNED GIFT?

Planned giving allows donors to maintain access to income during their lifetime, provide estate and tax planning tools and build permanent wealth for Montanan's charities, nonprofit organizations and local community foundations. Gift annuities, charitable trusts and some estate gifts fall into this category.

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN THE REAL WORLD?

In one real-world example involving a generous couple from Great Falls, their initial gifts over several years totaling approximately \$217,000 resulted in tax deductions and credits of nearly \$300,000. Imagine getting tax deductions and credits *greater* than your gifts and helping your favorite Montana charities at the same time.



Can't make the banquet this year? Cash donations are always welcome!



YES, I'd like to Make a Difference - One Family at a Time!

Here's my check Charge my credit card

Amount of gift \$ _____ Phone Number _____

Card # _____ Exp. Date _____ CVV _____

Name on card _____

Billing Address _____

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*Thank you to all of the individuals, families and businesses
who supported Big Hearts under the Big Sky this past year.
We couldn't do it without your generous support!*

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Big Hearts under the Big Sky is a program started by the Montana Outfitters and Guides Association. MOGA places children diagnosed with life threatening illness, women suffering from breast cancer and military veterans who have provided extraordinary service to our country, on fully guided and outfitted trips at no charge.

To meet the mission of the Big Hearts program, we partner with several well-known national charities. These MOGA partners perform a vital function of identifying qualified persons who desire and will benefit from an outfitted adventure trip of a lifetime in Montana. MOGA works to match their needs with the right outfitters and guides to fulfill their dreams. In some cases, our partners may also play an equally important role in helping execute the trip.

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Big Hearts Under the Big Sky

MOGEI

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www.bigheartsmt.org

406.449.3578



"After everything we've been through this past year, it's been so nice reconnecting as a family ... It's been a blast and we can't say thank you enough."

- Ryan and Jessica Barrett, 2018 Big Hearts trip recipients

**BIG
HEARTS**
under the **BIG SKY**
MONTANA OUTFITTERS & GUIDES ASSOCIATION

2019 BANQUET

Saturday, January 12, 2019



Master of ceremonies Gray Thorton,
CEO of Wild Sheep Foundation

*Making a difference -
one family at a time*

Join us for the
2019 benefit
banquet in

BOZEMAN

Best Western GranTree Inn

- Silent and live auction
- Meet and greet cocktail reception with trip recipients
- First-class dining experience

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[www.bigheartsmt.org!](http://www.bigheartsmt.org)