



Big Hearts Beat

Making a difference - one family at a time

Hunting for Elk in Paradise

Todd Dunlap, a 2017 Big Hearts under the Big Sky trip participant, says overlooking Paradise Valley during an elk hunt last fall was so incredible it was almost unreal.

“It’s postcard material, and you’re actually standing there, living a postcard moment.”

Dunlap’s enlisted military career spans 24 years. An electronic warfare and cryptology specialist, he completed seven tours to Iraq and the Persian Gulf in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and other efforts. He was also twice deployed to South America to assist the Drug Enforcement Administration with counter-narcotics work in Columbia and Ecuador.

Being gone for nine months at a time was hard, but coming home—although he was eager to—brought its own challenges, not least of which was readjusting to the pace of civilian life. “The adrenaline and tempo that you have on deployment is obviously through the roof with the amount of attention and focus that you have to have on a daily basis,” he said. The initial transition, during which he would sometimes only get two hours of sleep a night, could be rough on his family.

Dunlap’s final deployment prior to his retirement happened almost immediately after his wife gave birth



to their daughter Madison. He flew from San Diego to Iraq just six days after Madison was born. “That’s one of the toughest things that you’d ever have to do—hand over your newborn to your wife and jump on a plane not knowing what tomorrow brings,” he said. “That was a pretty tough day.”

In 2008, Dunlap retired as a Master Chief Petty Officer, the highest enlisted rank in the Navy. Immediately after his retirement from the Navy, Dunlap began serving Veterans in Montana with the Montana Veterans Authority, where his peers know him as a consummate professional and subject matter expert.

Dunlap travels all across the state helping veterans and their family

members navigate the complex VA system. He’s based out of Fort Harrison, but it’s not uncommon for him to travel four days a week.

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Letter from Big Hearts Banquet Chair



What a year of milestones!

This past January, Big Hearts under the Big Sky celebrated its 10th year of providing outdoor adventures to those who have served our country and those facing life-threatening illness. In 2017, Big Hearts provided five worthy trip recipients the opportunity to experience Big Sky Country with MOGA Montana Outfitters, at NO COST to them or their families.

We are also excited to share with you that we set an unprecedented fundraising record at the Big Hearts banquet and auction this year! Due to your donations and participation, Big Hearts grossed over \$92,000 at this year's event! We want to thank the volunteers, donors, and MOGA members who

donated auction items, time, and assistance, or opened their checkbooks. Your generous support made this event a tremendous success!

The successes of the past year have set a high bar for this coming year, but the MOGA Educational Institute (EI) board and staff are ready for the challenge and will be working on some of the following projects:

- The revival of The Big Hearts Beat newsletter.
- The Greater Helena Gives 24-hour online fundraising event on May 3-4, 2018.
- The Big Hearts Road Show, which will take the Big Hearts message to communities across Montana through a variety of speaking engagements.
- Big Hearts Ambassador training for those who accompany trip recipients on their adventures (May 5-6, 2018).
- Successful planning and execution of nine outdoor adventure trips.
- Supplementing our existing fundraising efforts with private events.
- A bigger and better Big Hearts banquet and auction at the MOGA Winter Convention, Saturday, January 12, 2019, in Bozeman!

If you are interested in volunteering with Big Hearts, participating in a fundraiser, or hosting a stop on the Road Show, please contact Mac or Kashia at 406.449.3578 or mogaoffice@mt.net. The Big Hearts family is always ready to grow!

From My Big Heart to Yours,

Rachel Kinkie Meredith, EI Board Member/Banquet Chair



Donating to Big Hearts under the Big Sky during Greater Helena Gives is a great way to multiply the impact of your generosity.

A donor has agreed to match \$5,000 of EVERY DOLLAR dedicated to Big Hearts during the event.

Help us reach our goal of raising \$20,000 during this 24-hour giving spree. Learn more at bigheartsmt.org

Volunteer Spotlight: Jon and Martha Kesler

Husband and wife team Jon and Martha Kesler share more than a last name—they also share a commitment to make Big Hearts under the Big Sky the best it can be by volunteering their time and talents. They're collective involvement with the organization tops 15 years.

Martha has been integral to Big Hearts since its founding 10 years ago. She helped to take it from a great idea with a handful of passionate supporters to a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit by writing its original bylaws and helping to file its establishment papers. Jon has been active as a Big Hearts Trip Ambassador for about five years. They both participate in the annual banquet by running the meet and greet portion of the event.

In addition to helping get Big Hearts off the ground, Martha has been instrumental to its continued success. Working alongside the Montana Community Foundation, she established an endowment that will enable Big Hearts to be more self-sustaining while also providing an attractive tax break to Montana residents who donate to Big Hearts. (See p. 5 for more information.)

Jon enjoys lending his patience, enthusiasm and camera skills to Big Hearts as a Trip Ambassador. He says he's always humbled by the way a whole community will rally around a participating family, whether that's by opening their private land to a hunt,

stringing a welcome banner through town, or donating a service like meat processing or trophy mounting to supplement a successful hunt. He also appreciates Big Hearts' focus on family reintegration as something that really sets it apart from other nonprofits that serve Veterans.



Jon remembers asking a participant about her favorite part of her Big Hearts experience as her family's trip was coming to a close.

He expected her to say that she really enjoyed seeing all of the different animals or horseback riding. Instead, she said, "You gave me my daddy back." Her father had been on two tours in Afghanistan, and their Big Hearts trip allowed them to spend quality time together as a family.

"I still get goose bumps when I tell that story," Jon says.

Although the Keslers recently moved from Clancy, Montana to Greensboro, North Carolina, they plan to stay active in Big Hearts. Martha serves on the National Board of Advisors and will continue to do so.

And true to form, Martha already has an idea how she'd like to put additional resources to work as the organization continues to grow. "I think that the volunteer opportunities have grown and become more defined," she said. "Anyone who's looking for an opportunity to get involved, there's incredible potential for what could be done if we had the arms and legs to make it happen."

FAST FACTS

Since 2008, Big Hearts has served **65 families/groups** totaling **390 people**. **Forty-five MOGA outfitters** have donated trips and/or services to Big Hearts participants, totaling **\$500,000 in Montana outdoor adventures**.

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

Ninety percent of your cash donations are spent putting those we serve out in the field.

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

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

Board of Directors

Mike Garcia, Chuck Rein, Rich Birdsell, Russ Kipp, Rachel Kinkie Meredith, Sherry Cargill

Staff

Mac Minard, Executive Director
Kashia Herring, Executive Assistant

National Board of Advisors

Denny Wendell, Greg Stube,
Martha Kesler

Stitching Trip Mementos to Last



Every Big Hearts trip recipient receives a handmade quilt that has been lovingly made by volunteers from all over the country. These talented quilters are an integral part of the Big Hearts under the Big Sky family.

The quilts are presented to trip recipients the night of their celebration dinner. They are given to Veterans as a gift to recognize all that they have endured in their service to the United States, and as a symbol of the fabric of the American culture that they have bravely fought for and defended.

For those who are fighting life threatening illnesses, the quilt represents the family, a centerpiece of the American way of life. They are presented from one family—the Montana Big Hearts family—to another, in recognition of the sacrifices made by the whole family and in awe of their commitment to be there for one another.

Nine quilts will be needed for 2018 trip participants. If you would like to help with the donation of a quilt or know someone who might be interested, please contact the Big Hearts office at 406.449.3578.

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Thus, the Dunlaps were deeply appreciative for an opportunity to reconnect this fall at the Mountain Sky Guest Ranch southwest of Emigrant. Paradise Valley holds a special place in the hearts of Todd and his wife Deborah since it's close to Livingston, where they grew up.

“Mountain Sky Guest Ranch is absolutely magnificent, across the board,” Dunlap said. “World-class facilities, world-class staff and meals ... It's one of those place that you dream about.”



Dunlap was successful in his quest to bring home an elk—with the help of his guides Kyle and Wyatt, he brought down a nice six-point bull during

opening weekend of rifle season—but the trip was successful in other ways as well.

Madison, who's 16 years old now, became quite enthralled with the ranch's horses and befriended a wrangler who works there. This spring, she's returning to Mountain Sky to ride all of the ranch's trail horses to ensure they're ready to go for the upcoming visitor season.

“She had an absolute blast,” Dunlap said. “It was an amazing experience across the board.”



LEAVE A LASTING MONTANA LEGACY THROUGH PLANNED GIVING



Planned giving provides you the opportunity to create a lasting and meaningful impact for years to come. Your contribution will leave a legacy that will provide outdoor guided trips to military service men and women who provided extraordinary service to our country, children who face life-threatening illnesses, and women who battle breast cancer.

Please consider including Big Hearts under the Big Sky in your estate plan. Through an annuity, bequest or cash donation, your support will help us in our mission to make a difference, one family at a time.

Montana Endowment Tax Credit

The Montana Endowment Tax Credit, or METC, enables donors to

pay less in state income taxes when giving a planned gift to a qualified Montana charitable endowment. The year-end tax benefits 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 circumstances.

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.

Bequests

Remember Big Hearts in your will or living trust with a gift that will live on. Many have found that including Big Hearts 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 organization.

For more information on leaving your legacy, contact the Big Hearts office at 406.449.3578 or visit bigheartsmt.org/contribute.

THANK YOU!!!

Big Hearts would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who helped with the 2018 banquet. Your participation as donors, sponsors, volunteers and guests made the evening a huge success. We look forward to seeing you at next year's event!

Big Hearts Under the Big Sky

MOGEI

5 Microwave Hill Rd., Suite 1

Montana City, MT 59634

moga@mt.net

www.bigheartsmt.org

406.449.3578

“The best organization I’ve been a part of in my life. Love these folks here!”

- U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Nathan Shurter,
2017 Big Hearts trip recipient



2019 BANQUET

Saturday, January 12, 2019

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
- More information to come at bigheartsmt.org

Join us as we celebrate our achievements and recommit ourselves to another year of service.

Making a difference - one family at a time