

'Thank You for Believing in Me'

VFW's 'Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship' helps change the life of an Ohio Army National Guard veteran

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Joe Giffen, 30, is originally from Boston. Today, he lives in Davenport, Iowa, with his wife, Erin. Soon, he will graduate from the University of Dayton with a doctorate in education in leadership for organizations. He credits the VFW with playing a major role in getting him to this point.

In 2009, Giffen began a six-year military career in the Ohio Army National Guard and enrolled in college soon after. Most of his time in service was spent stateside, but it did include one combat tour in Afghanistan in 2013.

Unable to study while abroad, Giffen resumed his education once he returned home. He heard about the VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" from his VFW Post Commander and applied.

"This scholarship has truly changed my life, and in turn, my family's lives," he said. "Thank you for believing in me and my work. I hope I can pay it forward through my continued support of the veteran community."

One might view Giffen's education as a natural next step in his commitment to serve. About enlisting, he explained, "I wanted to do something meaningful with my life. As someone who is service-oriented, that was, in my mind, the best way to do that."

Once Giffen graduates, he will continue to serve in a different way. He hopes to do consulting work for career service offices throughout the country to help nontraditional students like veterans, international students and adult learners.

Through those experiences, combined with research for his dissertation, Giffen hopes to gain the knowledge he needs to advance further.

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“The degree will allow me to work in the upper echelons of higher education,” he said. “My goal is to become an executive director of an experiential learning center at a Division I research institution.”

Well on his way to achieving his objective, Giffen realizes the essential role education has played. He hopes other veterans consider taking similar action to pursue their own dreams.

“College is hard, but in the end, it’s the single most powerful experience you can have for your career and learning outside of your military experience,” he said.

Giffen urges others not only to enroll but also to experience college to the fullest.

“Become active on your campus. The connections you make can be life-changing,” he said. Find the veteran center and talk with them about your needs or struggles. They can help you find what you need to be successful.”

Giffen knows how rewarding the payoff is for all the hard work. He appreciates the support that helped him make the most of his college experience.

“Working full time and going to school full time wasn’t paying the bills,” he said. “This scholarship allowed me to stop going to food banks and to stop taking on major student loans. It also gave me a sense of pride knowing that someone appreciated my work and goals enough to help me through one of the tougher times in my life.”

Learn more about the VFW "[Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship](#).”