

WYOMING TRIBUNE EAGLE



Horns for Heroes founder Ben Barto of Dubois stands outside his trailer Monday in Cheyenne. The organization was founded in 2016 to help veterans and their families in need to secure employment. Blaine McCartney/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Wyoming nonprofit helps veterans across the nation

HORNS FOR HEROES SUPPORTS VETERANS THROUGH ELK, DEER ANTLER DONATIONS AND ARTISTRY

By **Chrissy Suttles**
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

CHEYENNE—Self-taught artist and Dubois resident Ben Barto has long considered himself an entrepreneur.

Born in Rock Springs, he was selling vegetable and flower seeds from the back of comic books at age 6 and earned the title “paperboy of the month” by age 10.

In 1974, Barto was hired by Pacific Power as a materials inspector in Oregon, during which time he became interested in hand-carving elk and moose antlers as a part-time hobby.

He then started wholesaling his work to Cabela’s and increasing his visibility. After meeting his now-wife,

At a glance

Wyoming resident Ben Barto founded the nationwide nonprofit Horns for Heroes in 2016 to support local veterans through the sale and repurposing of deer and elk antlers. For more information, visit www.hornsforheroes.com.

Sherry, the two expanded their enterprise to hand-crafted knives, magnets, Christmas ornaments, wine bottle holders, Christmas tree toppers and patented antler Christmas trees.

They eventually sold their merchandise to Bass Pro Shops, Sportsman’s Warehouse, Gander Mountain, Ace Hardware and hundreds of gift shops.

In 2014, Barto watched Dana Bowman, the first double amputee to re-enlist in the military, skydive during a Green Beret Foundation event. Barto was so inspired by the ceremony that he made the

decision to focus his efforts on helping veterans throughout Wyoming and the rest of the country.

“Dana, founder of the Halo for Freedom Warrior Foundation, invited me to a yearly wounded warrior event of shooting games, helicopter hog hunting and fundraising,” Barto said. “After spending time with these veterans, hearing their stories and learning that roughly 23

veterans commit suicide every day, I knew I needed to figure out a way to help.”

As a result, Barto founded Horns for Heroes in 2016. Through the 501(c)3 nonprofit, Barto hires Wyoming

veterans to build a variety of art using deer and elk horns, most of which are donated to and purchased by the

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Ben Barto
Founder of nonprofit
Horns for Heroes

organization. In addition to supporting local veterans, Horns for Heroes donates thousands of dollars to Wyoming Veterans of Foreign Wars posts and American Legions from the collected horns.

“Most military personnel and their friends are hunters and thus have ant-

lers stored somewhere that are worth up to \$15 per pound,” Barto said. “Our effort is to gather and purchase antlers to help veterans in their hometown.”

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Barto: Hopes to honor his father

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Members of the organization travel throughout the country, selling merchandise and promoting Horns for Heroes at pop-up shops and markets.

Barto said he hopes to not only help veterans, but to honor his father, a U.S. Air Force veteran.

“A football injury my senior year kept me from being drafted,” he said. “Because I wasn’t a veteran, and I should have been, hearing some of the struggles was enough to motivate me. We have donated hundreds of knives and thousands of dollars to veterans and developed a line of fundraiser products for all

Legions and VFWs.”

James Huntington, an American Legion member and Cheyenne resident, said he hopes local organizations take note of Barto’s enthusiasm.

“Veteran services in the county leave a lot to be desired,” he said. “Working to find new ways to provide funding and employment to vet organizations is never a bad thing.”

For more information about Horns for Heroes, visit www.hornsforheroes.com.

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