

# A CALL TO SERVE: A NATIVE AMERICAN'S PATH TO WDVA TRIBAL LIAISON

February 14, 2018 | By Chris Bucher



**Ever since he was child, Shaun Stoeger knew his calling involved lending a hand to others. Not only was it a passion, it was engraved in his DNA.**

Stoeger, whose family roots run through the Lakota Sioux Tribe, didn't wait long to fulfill that childhood dream. Stoeger used the United States Army's Delayed Entry Program, and was in basic training one month after graduating high school in the Madison area. Soon enough, he was active duty and served honorably for three-and-a-half years.

Stoeger's one of the more than 150,000 American Indian and Alaska Native Veterans living in the U.S., according to 2012 data from the U.S. Department of Defense. Native Americans serve in the armed forces in greater numbers per capita than any other ethnic group, the data shows. Part of the reason Stoeger felt called to serve isn't just the sense of compassion that was already embedded in him; it was also the culture that was passed down, he said.

"Lakota's have a very strong warrior culture, and I think that came natural to me," he said. "There was no other part of the military that interested me at all other than combat-oriented professions. I wanted to get into it and do it."

Following his service, Stoeger attended the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy. He stayed active with an on-campus American Indian group and obtained an internship with the Wisconsin

Department of Veterans Affairs within its grant program.

After interning, he served one-and-a-half additional years active duty before spending nine years in the Wisconsin National Guard. He also worked as a law enforcement officer before suffering an injury that led to him seeking other work.

Despite the injury, Stoeger's aptitude of helping others was still firmly on his mind, and he circled back to a familiar place.

In August 2017, he landed a job as the tribal liaison for the WDVA. In the role, he's able to use the experience and

connections he's gained as a American Indian serving in the military to his advantage. He works with each of the 11 federally-recognized tribes in Wisconsin to guide Veterans to available resources.

"I help the TVSOs (Tribal Veterans Service Officers) and give them what they need and acquaint them with any changes in benefits or eligibility requirements," Stoeger said. "I help them with whatever questions they may have, and I also help connect them to a lot of resources they don't know about."

For Stoeger, working with the WDVA and helping fellow Veterans is the best job he's ever had.

"I tell my boss that I've never worked a single day since I've been here," he said. "I love my job, and I've never really had that feeling before."

**"I need a job that has purpose and fulfillment, one that gives me a distinct mission where I'm helping people. This job is exactly that. Every single day, if I'm not directly helping someone, like a homeless Veteran trying to find resources, then I'm able to help indirectly."**

Many Native American Veterans are eligible for a wide range of benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Those include disability compensation, pension, education, job training, home loans, employment and more. To learn more through the federal VA, visit [bit.ly/TribalVets](http://bit.ly/TribalVets).