

James Heiden, from homeless to Marine to Ivy Tech student

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To celebrate the Fourth of July, we're highlighting some veterans who served our country and now attend Ivy Tech Community College. So, put down that hot dog, look away from the fireworks, and meet James Heiden.

James Heiden, 30, owes a lot to the Marine Corps. Post September 11th, James' chosen career as a travel agent was all but grounded, and he wandered with no direction, no job, no place to stay, and no future. One night, he fell asleep in his car in the parking lot of the Marine Corps recruiter office. The recruiter knocked on his window to wake him, and told James to get out of his parking spot. Invited in for coffee, James and the recruiter inked the deal that changed the course of his life. One week later, James was in Indianapolis taking the tests and physicals necessary to enlist in the Marine Corps.



James Heiden, infantryman in the Marine Corps, is majoring in Electrical Engineering so he can build and market his energy harnessing device.

He served four years as an infantryman in the Marine Corps. He spent time stationed in Japan, where he climbed Mt. Fuji. He was deployed to Fallujah, Iraq, for seven months, where he posted security for the historical first Iraqi general election in 2005. To identify citizens who had already voted and discourage voting more than once, Iraqi voters' thumbs were dipped in purple ink. James watched "all those happy people with their purple thumbs," while on duty. He handed out "soccer balls and teddy bears, and candy to hungry kids while on patrol." Those kinds of experiences "pull at your heart strings and stay with you always," James explains.

James enjoyed the structure, the precision, and the accuracy of Marine Corps life. But, in 2007, he thought his future lay outside the military. He enrolled at Purdue University North Central, but personal struggles zapped his energy and concentration, resulting in less than acceptable grades. So, James listened to his mother and sister, both of whom attend Ivy Tech, and his advisor, who recommended Ivy Tech Community College. Using his veteran's benefits, James gained a fresh start toward his degree without sacrificing the quality of his education.

James began taking classes at Ivy Tech in January 2012, majoring in Electrical Engineering. His goal is to get the education necessary to build his invention. James developed a system that harnesses the in-coming or out-going water pressure in a house's water lines, converting that pressure to electricity that can be used for appliances such as microwaves and televisions. He knows this type of dream could take years, but if he "dedicates the next 30 years and that's the one thing I can show for my life, it would be worth it."

James has come a long way from being a college dropout sleeping in his car, but his future is solid, thanks to the foundations provided by the Marine Corps and, more recently, Ivy Tech Community College.

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