



## **PRESS RELEASE**

*For Immediate Release*

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### **Community Rallies to Give Wounded Veteran a 'Dream Wedding' in Georgetown**

*Coalition to Salute America's Heroes organizes local volunteers, businesses to create special ceremony for Mt. Orab couple on May 31*

*CINCINNATI* (May 19, 2014) – U.S. Army Sgt. Darren Downing was critically injured during a 2012 deployment to Afghanistan. Throughout his arduous six months of recovery and therapy at Walter Reed Medical Center, his girlfriend Brook put her life on hold and stayed by Downing's side.

"She went through just as much as I did coming back home, if not more," Sgt. Downing wrote. "I had support she didn't...She dealt with everything on her own. I leaned on her during my whole recovery; she carried both of our weight. She watched me look myself in the mirror every day, with tears in my eyes, disgusted for what had happened to me, for the deformity that my injury had left...She was there to pick me back up and to put me back together when I didn't know how. To this very day she still does all these things; some days are worse than others, but she is always there."

Following advice from others, Darren and Brook married quickly, before his medical retirement was completed. Brook "agreed to get married on such short notice without her dress, without her family, and without her friends," he continued. "She didn't get her fairy tale wedding that she had dreamed of her whole life...She made me promise that on the exact date a year from our original marriage, we could have a real wedding ceremony."

Lacking the wherewithal to give Brook the "dream wedding" she deserved, Sgt. Downing reached out to the [Coalition to Salute America's Heroes](#) for assistance. When the Coalition, a leading not-for-profit dedicated to rebuilding the lives of severely wounded veterans of the global War on Terror, received his email, the organization swung into action.

"Once I received clearance from his command, we authorized a \$3,500 grant to go toward the Downings' wedding reception," said Jil Hinds, the Coalition's director of veteran services. "Then I began reaching out to other people in Ohio and around the country. So many generous souls agreed to pitch in that before we knew it, we had put something very special together for this wonderful young couple."

The Downings will be married, again, on Saturday, May 31, at the Gas Light Theater in Georgetown, Ohio. The ceremony is being made possible by an outpouring of support from more than 20 businesses, organizations and individuals, each of whom was touched by the couple's story.

“My first call was to Heidi Janson, founder of Brides Across America,” said Hinds. “She found a designer to donate a gorgeous, \$8,000 wedding dress for Brook. Then two local bakers, Annette Fitzpatrick and Pearl Dyer, who also happen to be military spouses, agreed to donate the cake and serve as wedding planners. We were off to the races!”

Following is the list of most, but not all, of the people and organizations that have donated funds and/or services to the Downing wedding:

- [Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes](#) - \$3,500 for reception
- Party Works – wedding coordinators, wedding and reception décor, donation recruiting
- [Brown County Chamber of Commerce](#) – historical theater for ceremony
- [Brides Across America](#) – \$8,000 bride’s dress
- [Custom Layers](#) - wedding cake and guest favors
- [Valore Salon](#) - bride and bridal party salon services
- [U.S. Grant Homestead Association](#) - ceremony decor
- A&A Hitching Post Mt. Orab - rehearsal dinner
- Treasure Chest Flower Shop - bridal party bouquets
- J. Stephens Photography - engagement photos
- Jennifer Stewart Hamblen – video/slideshow production
- Jeanette Emery, seamstress - bridal fitting and alterations
- The Country Flower Shack - flowers
- Tonia Pinkerton and Becky Fiscus - Mary Kay Consultants
- [Operation Once in a Lifetime](#) - \$1,000 donation
- Chaplain Bill Graybill - wedding officiant
- Doug Green, Ohio District 66 Representative – wedding singer
- Willie Jeep - bride and groom getaway vehicle
- Tim Vogel – reception DJ

“This has been the ultimate labor of love for so many of us that have had the honor of helping with the Downing wedding,” said Fitzpatrick. “My only hope is that Brook and Darren feel the depth of appreciation we all have for their service and sacrifice, and that their special day is the fairy tale Brook always dreamed of.”

### **About the Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes**

The Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes, based in Leesburg, VA, has provided an invaluable, immediate lifeline to thousands of America’s wounded veterans since its establishment in 2004. The Coalition is distinguished from other veteran-focused organizations by its direct financial assistance to America’s wounded heroes. Its Emergency Financial Aid program has stopped foreclosure proceedings on veterans’ homes and kept their vehicles from being repossessed. The organization regularly provides gift checks to cover meals, medical and utility bills, clothing, car repairs and even baby diapers.

For more information, and to learn how you can support the Coalition’s mission, visit [saluteheroes.org](http://saluteheroes.org).

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