

Benevolist
1641 Brook Run Drive
Raleigh, NC 27613

CONTACT: Cole Shelton, PR Specialist
(919) 961-6011, sheltonc@ad.unc.edu



VETERAN REPURPOSES SERVING OTHERS

RALEIGH, N.C. — From a high school music enthusiast to a military medic to a nonprofit founder, Carl Whalen's life has been anything but conventional. Today, as a founder of Back the Heroes Rumble, he has translated his personal experience into a mission that brings hope and healing to families of fallen heroes.

After serving nearly six years in the U.S. Army as a medic, Whalen returned to civilian life facing unexpected challenges. Whalen was medically retired at a young age and found himself navigating a new career path. This includes the struggle of sudden life changes and giving up on his dream of continuing to serve in the Army. Through it all, his drive to serve others prevailed, just as it did in the Army.

The idea for Back the Heroes Rumble was born out of tragedy. In 2018, Whalen and his wife organized a car show to support a fallen officer's family after a local sheriff's deputy was killed in the line of duty. The event raised \$16,000 and drew more than 500 vehicles.

"After the dust settled, my wife and I said, 'We should keep doing this, not just for one fallen hero, but for all of them,'" Whalen recalled.

What started as a one-time event evolved into a nonprofit organization with multiple programs. Back the Heroes Rumble now operates three major programs: Operation Never Forget, Operation Open Arms, and Project Little Hero. Each program supports first responder and military communities, from honoring fallen heroes to hosting toy drives for service families. From the moment Carl realized the impact of his first car show, he knew that there was potential for large-scale impact. Since its inception, Back the Heroes Rumble has served 37 police and fire departments with over \$60,000 in equipment and supported more than 1,500 children through its events.

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Benevolist, a platform Whalen discovered by accident, has played a crucial role in expanding the organization's reach. Initially seeking Benevity for corporate donor connections, Whalen stumbled upon Benevolist and realized Back the Heroes Rumble could use the platform. Benevolist was a convenient and organized way to fulfill wish lists for their toy drives and their fundraiser needs.

"Benevolist allowed us to tell the community exactly what we needed and why," he explained. "It wasn't just about getting donations; it was about making the families feel seen, valued, and appreciated."

For Whalen, the mission is deeply personal. After grappling with his own mental health challenges, he struggled to restructure the purpose he served in the Army: always helping others.

"God wasn't done with me yet," he said. "This work is part of my continued service, just without the uniform." "Service doesn't end when you take off the uniform." "It's about living a life of purpose, remembering those we've lost, and lifting up those who carry on."

Whalen's story is a symbol of resilience, empathy, and the power of community. He embodies the heroes he strives to honor every day.

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