

Petty Ofc. 1st Class Eric Pope, Navy Veteran

U.S. Bank Driven to Serve

Interview Date: Oct. 9, 2024

Arlington, Texas



Navy Veteran Expresses ‘Huge’ Gratitude for Reliable Vehicle

Before enlisting in the Navy, Eric Pope had a career as a mortician. At age 26, he decided to follow in the path of his two grandfathers and a great-grandfather and joined the military.

“It had been nagging on my heart for a long time,” said Eric, explaining that the pull to serve grew stronger each year after 9/11.

He joined the Navy in 2007 and became a culinary specialist. He worked in the supply department aboard the USS Pennsylvania, a ballistic missile submarine.

He deployed eight times off the Pacific Coast on the submarine, spending an average of three months under water each time. The longest submarine deployment lasted 147 days. In stark contrast, he also deployed on land to Afghanistan in 2011 in support of a Marine unit.

“I went from no sun to too much sun,” Eric said, noting his fair skin “got a little red” under the desert sun.

While serving in Afghanistan, Eric suffered a fall as a result of an explosion. The incident caused a traumatic brain injury, fractured lower back, hearing loss, and bulging discs in Eric’s neck and back. In addition to those injuries, he lives with PTSD. Even after suffering injuries, Eric continued to serve.

“I wasn’t ready to give up,” he said.

In 2013, after going through a divorce and receiving sole custody of his daughter and two sons, Eric separated from the Navy with an honorable discharge. The children were in elementary school at the time.

“Even though it meant the end of a career that I loved, my children mattered more, and I wanted to be there for them as they grew up,” he said.

Eric settled in Arlington, Texas, as he earned a degree in culinary arts and built a career in the hospitality field, but life presented challenges.

“I had a lot of great positive things, but it’s more of a transition to civilian life,” he said. “I struggled to establish myself as a civilian.”

In 2020, Eric married Maddie, a behavioral therapist who works with children with autism. His two oldest children — 21-year-old Mahalia and 18-year-old Tobias — live independently. The youngest, 16-year-old Tucker, is a high school junior. Eric’s service dog, Ricey, joined the family in January.



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The dog, a chocolate English Labrador retriever, eases the anxiety Eric feels when he's in public and helps him feel comfortable in settings such as grocery stores and movie theaters.

Eric now works as the executive chef at a hospital, a role more accommodating than his previous physically demanding job in catering.

"I do more office work than I did in my previous jobs," he said. "I had to find a different job because (the pain) was becoming a big issue."

As a single parent, Eric has learned to stretch the family budget. However, the finances have taken several major hits this year. Plumbing issues followed on the heels of a failed stove, refrigerator, and air conditioner.

He has also faced repair bills for the family's only vehicle, a 2005 Chevrolet Equinox with about 150,000 miles on the odometer.

With money already tight, the family budget did not allow for a new car.

The family juggles transportation needs for school, work, and medical appointments around the single vehicle. Some days, that means long hours for either Eric or Maddie as they wait for the other to finish work.

Eric felt relief when he learned he will receive a vehicle through Operation Homefront and U.S. Bank's Driven to Serve program. Through the partnership, U.S. Bank has generously provided 30 vehicles to military families in need.

The new vehicle will allow Eric to get to VA appointments easily and enable him to further his education through the VA vocational rehabilitation program. The family's first outing, though, will likely be for ice cream, and Ricey will get a pup cup.

Eric said his appreciation for the donors who make Operation Homefront's programs possible is difficult to quantify.

"The gratitude we have is so huge it can't fit into anything I can think of," he said. "This is a much-needed positive for us."

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Navy veteran*