

## **SONGS 4 SOLDIERS**

With parental permission, Dustin Row enlisted in the U.S. Army while still in high school. "I joined in June of 2001. On September 11th, I was sitting in Government class watching the second plane hit the building..."

Like so many others, 9/11 would change the course of Row's life. After serving in the Iraq war and surviving a brutal attack on his supply convoy, Row eventually returned home to Columbia, Illinois. But the war was far from over for many who served, including some of his friends. "A few years passed, and a buddy called me and said Ricky killed himself. That was the thing that made me wake up a little bit," said Row. "I'm a musician, and I just wanted to figure out a way to count my blessings and channel them into something to help my fellow combats out ... and then I looked over at the baseball field, and I was like – Boom! - Songs for Soldiers! Let's do a concert called Songs 4 Soldiers and give the money to some organization that helps combat veterans."

Row began searching for the right charity to partner with, but the sea of administrative costs turned him off. Taking matters into his own hands, he started his own non-profit and Songs 4 Soldiers was born. With an all-volunteer board (along with generous sponsors), one hundred percent of each donation goes directly to those in need. To date, S4S has collected over \$500,000 in monetary contributions and assisted hundreds of combat veterans.

Tied in with the VA, Songs 4 Soldiers helps fill in the gaps. The organization has helped with everything from medical bills and utilities to home and car repairs - even employment. "It's easy to band-aid a situation, but we try to truly help them. So instead of just helping with rent, we'll also offer to help them with a job. We want to put them on a path to self-sustainment, so they don't have to return to a charity for help. The original intent was to help four combat veterans a year, but it kept growing, and I have a tough time stopping it. I love it!" says Row.

Although S4S holds various fundraisers yearly, its biggest event is an annual outdoor concert in Columbia, Illinois. What began in 2013 as a fairly straightforward show with a few local cover bands has evolved into a professionally- produced, family-friendly, two-day-long extravaganza. It has even drawn the star power of talent like Bret Michaels, Granger Smith, and Diamond Rio.

For more information or to donate, go to [www.songs4soldiersstl.org](http://www.songs4soldiersstl.org).