

Lending a helping hand

A nonprofit organization offers financial assistance to industry workers in need.

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A little more than a year ago, in early July 2016, Bryce Sauser was vacationing at his house on Lake Limestone. He was swimming in the lake, enjoying the long July 4th weekend, when his life changed forever. Sauser dove into the lake but hit a shallow bottom, broke his neck and drowned. He was pulled from the lake, his brother administered CPR and, 13 minutes later, Sauser was revived—but paralyzed. At the time, Sauser worked as an account representative for Halliburton. But after his accident he was rendered immobile and confined to an electric wheelchair. His family was facing escalating medical bills in addition to needing to refit the family's home to make it more accessible for him.

A helping hand from within Sauser's own industry reached out and provided him and his family the aid they needed. Oilfield Helping Hands (OHH), a Houston-based nonprofit organization providing financial help to those working in the oil and gas industry, paid for an accessible bed and other fittings for Sauser's League City, Texas, home, where he lives with his wife, their 2-year-old daughter and his mother. Sauser said that although much of his body is still paralyzed, he is slowly regaining mobility in his arms. He said the assistance from OHH came at a time of need for him and his family and that he was grateful for the help.

"It means a lot to me that they're willing to help me and other people working in the oil field whenever they have an accident like this," Sauser said. "It's just very much appreciated."

The start of something good

OHH was established in 2003 when a group of Halliburton employees organized a sporting clays tournament to raise money for a co-worker whose family was facing mounting financial trouble as a result of high-cost surgeries and other medical problems. OHH representative Mona Ansley said the event proved to be such a success that the organizers decided to register the organization as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Fourteen years later OHH has grown to six chapters in Texas, Oklahoma and Louisiana and, as of July, had donated nearly \$3.8 million to 374 recipients.



Among the events hosted by OHH's Houston chapter is an annual clay shoot. (Source: Oilfield Helping Hands)

The organization has been recognized by some of the oil and gas industry's leading charitable efforts, including the 2011 Hunting Art Prize. This year OHH earned the Distinguished Achievement Award at the Offshore Technology Conference (OTC), which came with a \$200,000 donation from OTC.

OHH's mission is to provide financial assistance to oil industry employees who are facing a financial crisis as a result of serious medical issues or other serious circumstances.

"We try to lift people up a little bit," Ansley said. "They might be in a bind for all different kinds of reasons. They may have a child with cancer and they can't work. They may need help with their child. They may be late on mortgage payments. There are so many reasons they may need help."

During the past several years, OHH has helped one family whose father was killed in a drunk-driving accident, another family whose primary financial provider was battling cancer and another who lost their young son. For someone to qualify for financial assistance from OHH, they must have worked in the oil and gas industry for at least five years, Ansley said, and 75% of their income must be derived from the E&P section of the industry.



Oilfield Helping Hands hosts several fundraising events throughout the year to help raise money for oil industry workers in need of assistance. (Source: Oilfield Helping Hands)

Eligibility and fundraising

Potential recipients also must live within one of the territories represented by an OHH chapter, though Ansley said if an employee of a corporate sponsor were to need assistance, OHH would consider that applicant regardless of where he or she lived.

Applicants also must be sponsored by an OHH representative and submit an application to the organization. Each month the organization's selection committee meets to decide its recipients and its funding amount, although Ansley said the organization has the ability to offer financial assistance on an emergency basis without the need of a committee meeting.

"If they ask us for help and we can see the need, we pretty much provide them the money," she said. "We know we can't pay exorbitant hospital bills, but maybe we can at least help pay off a car loan so that it frees up that monthly obligation. We try to be a little bit creative and put ourselves in their position to see what we can do to help."

OHH raises money primarily through its member partners and its events held throughout the year. Platinum members donate at least \$15,000 per year, gold memberships start at \$10,000 per year and silver partnerships start at \$7,000 per year.

"So it's not a whole lot to be able to give back to your community and really make a difference," Ansley said.

Its annual events vary depending on the regional chapter but typically include sporting clays tourna-

ments, fishing tournaments, golf tournaments and pistol shoots. The Rocky Mountain chapter holds OHH Night at Coors Field for a Colorado Rockies baseball game, a motorcycle rally in the spring and its Bowling and Billiard Dash in December. OHH's newest chapters are located in the Permian Basin and in South Texas, representing the Eagle Ford Shale.

Ansley said people can get involved with OHH by becoming a member, becoming a corporate sponsor or volunteering with the organization. OHH currently features more than 3,000 members. Although it's free to become an OHH member, the organization asks that its members regularly participate in fundraising events and attend at least four monthly meetings a year. Other opportunities include sponsoring an event, offering a raffle prize or purchasing raffle tickets at an OHH event, or simply making an individual donation.

Ansley said since the industry downturn, OHH has experienced a decline in both its funding and its event participation. She also said the number of requests for assistance has increased.

"People don't seem to be spending quite as much," she said. "But it is starting to come back." **ESP**

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