

'There Is Always a Way'

Marine veteran Jonathan Cruz is grateful for the VFW's assistance that helped him complete his master's degree

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Jonathan Cruz, 39, lives in Painesville Township, Ohio, with his wife, Michelle; son, Jonathan Jr.; and stepdaughter, Desiree. He is in his second year at Kent State University's College of Podiatric Medicine (KSUCPM) and is excited to begin practicing as a foot and ankle surgeon.

Although Cruz describes a career in medicine as his lifelong pursuit, he did not always recognize a clear path forward.

"There were many times that I felt I was not qualified for this career due to cultural or academic reasons," Cruz said. "It seemed my life was always straying in other directions, and I would feel discouraged."

During an especially low point, Cruz was contacted by a Marine Corps recruiter.

"I was in a bad place," he explained. "After evaluating my options and what direction to go, I received the call. It felt slightly serendipitous because it was what I needed at the time."

Cruz wanted more discipline and to remove himself from influences that made success difficult in the past. He wanted to start fresh but needed help.

"I felt I was not strong enough to achieve my goals alone," he said. "Joining the Marines was not a popular decision within my family, but they couldn't stop me from pursuing what I felt was right for me."

Cruz served nearly five years as a Russian linguist and became a member of the VFW. After service, he discovered the VFW's "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship" program while reading VFW magazine and email newsletters.

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“For a long time, I wondered if I would be eligible but never followed through with finding out,” he said. “Finally, my wife encouraged me to. I was awestruck when I was chosen as a recipient!”

Cruz is grateful for the assistance that helped him complete his master’s degree in applied anatomy at Case Western Reserve University and begin his final program at KSUCPM. He is excited to graduate so he can help people live healthier lives and relieved that he did not have to take on considerable debt to do so.

“Thanks to the scholarship, I can finish my education without placing an enormous burden on my family,” he said. “Getting a medical education is not affordable. I’m grateful for the support to achieve my dream — I’m in medical school right now thanks to it!”

If Cruz has one regret, it is that he did not apply for the scholarship earlier. He encourages individuals who think they may be eligible to act sooner:

“Don’t wait — just go for it! You never know what you’re capable of until you try.”

And although facing the future can be overwhelming, Cruz assures other veterans that the hard work is worth it and that there is plenty of support along the way.

“There are resources available to help you have the career you desire. Seek out, relentlessly, those that can help you achieve your dreams,” he urged. “Ask questions of your fellow veterans, especially those who have pursued paths like the one you want to take. We all share similar experiences, similar goals and are happy to share advice, too.

“Never give up. Regardless of the obstacles you face, there is always a way.”

[Learn more](#) about the VFW "Sport Clips Help A Hero Scholarship."