

31 Stadiums, 1 RV, 3 Friends and a Fallen Hero's Dream

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In 2002, while training for the U.S. Army in Fort Rucker, Alabama, football enthusiasts Nathan Thompson and his friend Joe Lusk dreamed of traveling the United States in an RV during football season. They would visit each of the thirty one NFL stadiums across America, watching a different matchup at a different venue each Sunday, and even catching a few college games along the way.

That dream, however, remained exactly that – a dream.

In 2005 both Joe and Nathan deployed to Iraq with the U.S. Army, and tragically, Joe would not return home. “I arrived to Kuwait three days before his [Joe’s] apache crashed during a training exercise,” recalls Nathan. The apache gunner lost his life on January 21, 2005.

Thompson, upon returning from his second deployment to Iraq, wanted to honor his friend’s memory in the best way he knew how. The dream of a 31 stadium tour they once shared was never far from his thoughts and he decided turning this dream into a reality would be the perfect tribute.

“Joe and I planned this trip together when we were in flight school at Fort Rucker...I know Joe would do it for me,” said Thompson.

He recruited his brother Aaron, friend Nolan Myers and began mapping out the cross country tour. They would travel 30,000 miles, visit 31 NFL stadiums, and 9 college stadiums. They would host tailgate fundraisers along the way to raise money for the [Joe F. Lusk II Memorial Fund](#), an organization set up by Lusk’s family to provide financial assistance to families of military personnel killed or wounded while serving our country. They named the project simply, “[31 Stadiums](#).”

“Joe was a proud proponent of having a good time and enjoying the company of friends and family. He worked extremely hard at everything he did and was an outstanding and inspirational athlete, student and leader at the U.S. Military Academy,” says Thompson.

The tour kicked off on Sept. 7 in Tallahassee as the Hurricanes defeated the Seminoles, and

NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

406 W. 34th Street
Kansas City, MO 64111
Office 816.756.3390
Fax 816.968.1157

WASHINGTON OFFICE

200 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
Office 202.543.2239
Fax 202.543.6719

info@vfw.org
www.vfw.org

three days later they witnessed an exciting overtime victory at Pittsburgh's Heinz Field.

The three men have been able to cover most of the expenses like gas, parking and food on their own. The Veterans Ticket Foundation (Vettix) helped them prepare a tailgate-ready RV, complete with 31 Stadium tour and Lusk Fund decals, and even provided them with tickets to a few games.

When VFW National Headquarters was informed the group had not received tickets to a Kansas City Chiefs game, the VFW wanted to do its part to support the cause. Located in a city ranked 8th according to the America's Best Football Tailgating Cities Index, VFW provided each of the men with a ticket to Arrowhead Stadium on October 25 as the Chiefs take on conference rival, the San Diego Chargers.

The very colorful "31 Stadiums" RV has drawn a lot of attention already according to Thompson. "People are constantly asking questions and most of them want to join us for the trip and are very jealous; I never said we weren't going to have fun along the way, in essence, it's what Joe would've wanted."

So far, more than \$1,500 has been raised for the Lusk Fund. For more information or to make a donation, please visit 31stadiums.com.

Listen to Nate Thompson's interview with VFW's talk radio show, [*The National Defense*](#).