

# News and stories

## Altruism: Pilot to the Gold Stars

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Chris Gaitten | [Columbus Monthly](#)

### **A Grove City police officer, a distinguished WWII veteran and a benevolent aerial mission**

On Feb. 4, Hershel “Woody” Williams stepped to midfield for the Super Bowl LII coin toss. Roughly 100 million people saw the 94-year-old veteran, the last living recipient of the Medal of Honor from the Battle of Iwo Jima, grin and give a big thumbs-up. Grove City police officer Chris White also spotted the thin blue line ring on Williams’ right hand, a show of support for law enforcement. White was elated.

Almost two weeks later, he’s still talking about that moment. In a hangar at Rickenbacker airport, White scrolls through his phone for a screenshot of Williams and his ring. Nearby, the 1963 Beechcraft Twin Bonanza plane he co-owns with Grove City police sergeant Doug Olmstead is under repair. Several times every year, White volunteers the plane and his time to fly Williams across the Midwest and East Coast to fundraisers and dedications for the Hershel Woody Williams Medal of Honor Foundation.

Before his turn as Williams’ pilot, aviation was just a shared passion for White and Olmstead, who met in 1995 in the police academy. In 2003, they bought their first plane, a 1964 Mooney, and eventually

their pastime became a charitable endeavor—White opting for Veterans Airlift Command and Olmstead for Angel Flight. Both nonprofit organizations connect private pilots with those in need of transport, whether it's a cancer patient traveling for treatment or an injured vet going to a special event.

"There are not very many people who have an airplane like this who can do it, so why not me?" says White, the sergeant in charge of Grove City's detective bureau.

For one such flight, White signed up to transport Williams from his home outside Huntington, West Virginia, to a fundraising speech in Baltimore, Maryland. Through his foundation, Williams travels the country establishing Gold Star Families Memorial Monuments to honor those who have lost a loved one during military service. After that initial trip, White became Williams' principal pilot and now serves as the foundation's regional aviation coordinator.

Chad Graham, the foundation's president, says White's volunteered skills often play a vital role in facilitating Williams' daunting travel schedule when commercial flights aren't practical or even feasible. He recalls one trip in which White flew from Central Ohio to Huntington to pick up Williams, then on to Dayton, then to Cleveland, then to Bay City, Michigan, before traveling back to Huntington. A trip like that would be impossible without White, Graham says.

"He is a No. 1 pilot, very careful and very skilled in what he does," Williams says by phone from the road in Beebe, Arkansas.

White's respect for Williams is mutual. "By the end of the day, he's still going and I'm wiped out just following him around," White says. "And I'll tell you, he's like a rock star. People come up to him, and they're just all over him."

On Memorial Day 2016, White and Williams were both present for the dedication of a Gold Star Memorial in Grove City. Olmstead, who occasionally serves as co-pilot on the trips, says the monument is a direct result of White's commitment to the mission. "That

would have never happened in Grove City or in Central Ohio without the friendship and the special bond between Chris and Woody.”

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