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PRESS RELEASE

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By Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent, 168th ARW

Prestigious honors a reflection of a team

EIELSON AIR FORCE BASE, Alaska — When Senior Airman Shaun Hageman sat down for lunch with Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James in December 2014, as a representative of the 168th Air Refueling Wing, his first questions were, "What were your most troubling times? Where have you failed?"

"Everyone brings something different to the table," said Hageman, a 168th Air Refueling Wing Vehicle Maintenance Flight vehicle mechanic. "They may know something you don't, and if you ever find yourself in that same situation, you may have a little bit of enlightenment."

Hageman describes his job as fixing anything that doesn't leave the ground, from snow blowers to loaders, graders and everything in between.

After four years in the Alaska Air National Guard, Hageman was selected as 168th Air Refueling Wing Airman of the Quarter in June 2014. Then he was awarded 168th ARW Airman of the Year in December 2014, followed by Alaska Air National Guard Airman of the Year and Alaska Serviceman of the Year in February 2015.

"I can't even wrap my head around it; I'm still starstruck," Hageman said. "I felt great because it lets me know my coworkers respect me on that level and take notice of the things I do, but I wanted them to get the same notice and appreciation that it's on their behalf."

Vehicle maintenance Airmen consider themselves a family, said Tech. Sgt. Daniel Grant, 168th Vehicle Maintenance Flight heavy mobile equipment mechanic and Hageman's supervisor.

"A tree needs to come down, they help me, I help them. The car breaks down, we help each other. It's the camaraderie inside of work and out. If my wife needs anything and I'm not around, they'll help her and vice versa," Hageman said. "We've got each other's back. We're family."

These friendships make the team even stronger at work, he said. Success depends on it.

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"If you're struggling that's where you become your greatest; learning from your failures," Hageman said. "When you have people who have been there, done that and can show you another view on things, it makes it so much easier and you become more adaptive and intelligent because you have people with experience who want you to succeed."

Hageman's success is a product of the support of his peers and family, he said.

His peers push him to be his best, make sure he sets attainable goals and provide opportunities to volunteer, network and grow, he said.

"They set me up for success," Hageman said. "This is just a reflection."

Now Hageman is being considered for Air National Guard Airman of the Year.

For Grant, Hageman's achievements come as no surprise.

"He's a really fast learner," Grant said. "Shaun is one of those people where you can literally show him these things once and he retains it until he does it again."

Grant said working with Hageman is exhilarating.

"Shaun's the kind of guy that when you come into work and he doesn't see a smile on your face, he's going to put a smile on your face," Grant said.

He encourages his coworkers to take college classes and continue learning about anything that interests them, Grant said.

"You could go take any class you wanted to, just see what life's about. And when people do, I get that little heart-warming sensation like, 'I got to them,'" Hageman said.

The variety of equipment and challenges in vehicle maintenance presents endless learning opportunities – a mecca for an intrinsic learner like Hageman.

"Some things are generalized and you can just pick up on it," Hageman said. "You need people who have different perspectives to bring to the table. Even our higher ups are asking people like me how we would get an angle on a piece of equipment, because we all think differently. Somebody may have a better idea. Sometime we have to go with our best instinct or make our own tool to fix something, and I love that."

Learning is infectious, he said. He strives to continually learn from the people around him.

"Everyone is always a student," Hageman said. "You're not a teacher until you're done and at the end of the line and then you give back."

Hageman finished his associate's degree in process technology and is now pursuing a Bachelor in Technology in process technology, psychology and emergency management.

His next goal? To become a pilot.

"I really want to fly. That's my end goal," Hageman said. "I'm not picky. Throw me up in the air, I'll fly whatever. I'll be happy."

His success is a reflection of the support, camaraderie and teamwork of the 168th Vehicle Maintenance Flight. With that kind of team, no goal is too lofty. The sky is the limit.

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Photo captions:

20140624-F-MQ741-042
Tech. Sgt. Garrett Brown, Senior Airman Shaun Hageman, Tech. Sgt. Daniel Grant and Master Sgt. Clint Miller, 168th Vehicle Maintenance Airmen, pose for a photo in the 168th Vehicle Maintenance Shop, June 24, 2014. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent/Released)

20150302-F-MQ741-011
Senior Airman Shaun Hageman poses for a photo on Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, March 2, 2015. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Francine St. Laurent/Released)

20140203-F-DD045-002
While reconstructing an engine, Senior Airman Shaun Hageman, a 168th Air Refueling Wing Vehicle Maintenance Flight vehicle mechanic, checks the torque of parts of an engine Feb. 2015. (U.S. Air National Guard photo by Master Sgt. Cornelius Mingo/Released)