



ALOA member Carl Hedges, an Air Force veteran, worked with dozens of other volunteers to provide a barrier-free home for a disabled Iraq war veteran. Hedges installed four electric strikes, which were donated by Adams-Rite.

# The Repair Man

Fixing things has always been a way of life for Carl Hedges of Carl's Keys.

**By Haley Shapley**

**G**ROWING UP ON A FARM IN THE Midwest, Carl Hedges learned to repair things from an early age. "I was born and raised in Iowa, where we had to be self-sufficient," Hedges remembers. "We were farmers and we had to make do with what we had."

Given his background, perhaps it's no coincidence that he found his way into the locksmith industry, which he's been employed in for 35 years. The job requires plenty of ingenuity that he draws on from his childhood. "When you're out there by yourself, you're the master; you have to figure it out before you can leave," Hedges says. "If someone has a broken lock on their door that you've never seen before, you have to figure out how you're going to lock it before you leave."

## Taking It All in Stride

While serving in the United States Air Force, Hedges began working as a locksmith part-time. After he retired from the military in the late 1980s, he transitioned to full-time locksmith work. His one-man business, Carl's Keys, focuses mainly on commercial and residential work and services the Stevensville area of Maryland, a census-designated place not unlike the rural area Hedges grew up in.

Although he lives in nearby Annapolis, Hedges chose Stevensville to hang his business hat because he saw more need for his talents there. "It kind of takes me back to where I grew up," he says. "I enjoy it, because I get [to work in] open spaces once in a while."

That's not all about the job that he enjoys. A 35-year member of ALOA, Hedges can't imagine doing something different. "I've never thought about doing anything else as a profession," he says.

There are, of course, parts of his work Hedges likes less than others — like putting in deadbolts. "I look at it as being such an inconvenience to the customer; I carry tools in the house and make a mess on the floor,"



he says. Still, he finds the vast majority of the time he spends fixing problems for people is nothing but fun. "I enjoy it so much," Hedges says. "There's nothing really challenging; I just kind of take it all in stride."

### A Broader Background

Part of what Hedges enjoys is that no two days are exactly the same. "I like being able to get out and not having to do the same thing on a repetitive basis," he says. "I might be working on a house one time, then going into a commercial building and doing something there." He also loves that he gets to set his own hours, even if it means 18-hour days sometimes.

Plus, there are all the people he interacts with along the way, another highlight of the job. "I enjoy conversations and meeting people from different backgrounds and different trades and things of that nature," Hedges

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says. "It just broadens my background."

He takes customer service seriously, making sure that everyone who hires him is happy with the job. That, he says, is the key to a prosperous career in the long term. "I'm good, I treat them fairly, I'm honest with them, I show up when I say I'm going to be there," Hedges says. "I'm the type of guy that doesn't try to blow my horn very hard; I let my actions speak louder than my words."

One action that did just that was when Hedges donated his services to help build a

specially adapted, barrier-free home for an Army captain who lost both his legs after his vehicle rolled over a hidden explosive in Iraq. As part of a project called Homes for Our Troops, Hedges installed four electric strikes to work with the automatic door operators so that the injured veteran could move through his house freely. "Looking at my background, if something like that came up again, I would take part again," he says.

After all, there's nothing Hedges enjoys more than figuring out a fix and making someone's day. ☺



**Haley Shapley** is a freelance writer who covers topics ranging from business and travel to health, lifestyle and retail.

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