



OPERATION TROOP APPRECIATION

December 2005 Newsletter

Kristen's Corner

Dear OTA Volunteers and Friends,

As we close out 2005, we have much success to celebrate. Since OTA was founded 18 months ago (July 2004), we have provided "wish list" items for **more than 8,000 deployed troops** in Iraq and Afghanistan! Quite an accomplishment for an all-volunteer organization! But not at all surprising given the amount of passion and support OTA volunteers and patrons express for our American heroes.

Aside from the frequently requested items like Under Armour® t-shirts, sports equipment, DVDs and phone cards, OTA has sent fencing equipment, Bowflex and Weider weight machines and believe or not, an entire rock and roll band full of instruments. Yes, they're jammin' in Iraq these days!

As we prepare for 2006, we intend to build upon this success and ease the burden of deployment for thousands more troops. We thank you for your continuing support, and know that with you, we can present a united front of support to those who need it most.

Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

Sincerely,
Kristen Holloway, President

CleanTownUSA™ Salutes our Veterans

Veteran's Day is a time to remember all those who have served so bravely in our armed forces. This year, CleanTown USA™ Car Wash honored our veterans by sponsoring a three day car wash special. For every car that came through the car wash during Veteran's Day weekend CleanTownUSA donated \$1 to OTA.

OTA salutes Leigh Ann Schreiber and the entire staff at CleanTown USA (www.cleantownusa.com) who were not only a great bunch to work with, but who also demonstrated what it truly means to honor our veterans. We also thank Bob Munhall and the Gibsonsia American Legion for their help and generosity throughout the weekend.



Kristen Holloway (left) and Vice President of Public Relations Monica Orluk (right) were thrilled to be part of the weekend fundraiser.

Pittsburgh's Santa Spectacular and Light Up Night

Pittsburgh's annual Light Up Night marks the beginning of the Christmas season in Pittsburgh. And OTA was honored to be part of this year's Santa Spectacular and Light Up Night festivities!

Things were hopping at the OTA pavilion all evening! Our goal was to cover the OTA Christmas Tree with hundreds of stockings that represented a gift to a soldier, such as phone cards, DVDs Under Armour® and other requested items. Donors purchased these "gift stockings" and hung them on the tree, ensuring hundreds of soldiers would have a brighter Christmas and holiday season. Visitors at the pavilion signed Christmas cards and kids colored pictures for OTA to send to deployed soldiers this holiday season.

Infinity Broadcasting radio station K-Rock (93.7 fm) joined forces with OTA to make this a wonderful event, and a special shout out goes to the entire K-Rock and Infinity team for their generous help and support! It was a wonderful evening and despite the cold temperatures, our hearts were once again warmed by the generosity of the Pittsburgh community.



OTA volunteers stand by the stocking-covered Christmas Wish Tree. Left to right: Peggy Graeser, Ed Luzadder, Monica Orluk, Kristen Holloway, Jim Hill.

Need a Stocking Stuffer? Y-108 CDs benefit OTA

Pittsburgh's premier country radio station, Y-108 (107.9 fm), has released their annual "Best of 2005" CD. Titled **My Home's in Pennsylvania**, the CD includes twenty tracks of favorite characters and parody songs from Y-108's Morning Country Crew – Monty, Chris and Zeke. There are a few surprises too, including hilarious off-air outtakes from country stars Trick Pony!

Buy it today for only \$10 at Media Play at the Court in Robinson or Ross Park Mall in the North Hills.

All CD proceeds benefit Operation Troop Appreciation so hurry to Media Play today and grab your copy today! The CDs will only be available through December 24.



Thank you Duquesne Light Connectors Club!



OTA would like to thank the volunteers in Duquesne Light's Connectors Club who so generously helped OTA this year. The Connectors Club is made of Duquesne Light employees who donate their time and energy to various charities, organizations and community events.

Connectors Club volunteers helped at OTA's "Soldier's Christmas in August" fundraiser, and also donated the proceeds from their own annual fundraisers to OTA's troop projects! Their fundraisers included a fourth quarter Sarris Christmas Candy sale and a Macy's Department Store Discount Coupon sale in October.

Special thanks to Jeannie Peret at Duquesne Light for her endless support of OTA and for making it possible for our soldiers to benefit from the Connectors Club's spirit of giving and service.

OTA wins Redbook Award – Part II

As reported in our September newsletter, Kristen Holloway was one of the 2005 winners of Redbook Magazine's "Mothers and Shakers" Award for her efforts in starting and running Operation Troop Appreciation. Kristen was highlighted in the October issue of Redbook.

On Tuesday, September 19, Kristen was also honored with the other winners at a banquet in New York City's Lincoln Center. It was a great opportunity for this year's 8 winners to meet, share stories and celebrate their efforts to improve their communities by helping others.

This year's celebrity winners included Sharon Stone, Mariska Hargitay and Trisha Yearwood.



Kristen poses with fellow winner Sharon Stone at the Redbook Magazine awards banquet.

Christmas in Iraq and Afghanistan

With 150,000 soldiers who will be away from their families this year, OTA was intent on making the holidays a little brighter for our troops. Asked by several units to help them put on Christmas programs for their lonely and homesick troops, OTA got to work!

With the success of our fundraising event at the Pittsburgh Santa Spectacular at Light Up Night, and from the generosity of donors who wanted to remember and honor our soldiers this holiday, OTA was able to provide Christmas stockings and gifts to 1,000 deployed soldiers and marines.



In Their Own Words....

We'd like to share with you a very touching email we received from a chaplain working with one of the units OTA supported this Christmas. As much as Americans appreciate our troops and their sacrifices, it's heartening to know many Iraqis do, too. Chaplain Dwight Dunlap of the 61st Multifunctional Medical Battalion says it all, in his own words...

"Let me tell you about a person I just met just this past week. This person is a true hero of Iraq, and the ongoing war, who has a story that you will NEVER hear on any media outlet in the States.

I met her Monday evening when my assistant and I accompanied a group of soldiers and airmen to visit the hospital here on Anaconda. This woman is an Iraqi who is an interpreter for the coalition forces. She accompanied us to the hospital because many of the patients at the hospital are Iraqi citizens. Average "Joe" Iraqi citizens are often the targets of insurgents, who do not discriminate among age or sex. Besides being an interpreter, which makes this woman a high profile target, she is a Christian as well. She is originally from Baghdad, where she became an immediate target of the insurgents because of her assistance to the Coalition forces.

Her picture and a picture of one of her closest friends were posted on the walls of Mosques all throughout Baghdad. Just days after the postings, her friend was killed, not because she was not an interpreter, but only because of her association with one. This woman's house was then attacked by insurgents, killing one of her sons, and injuring her other son.

Now this woman and her surviving son live in "exile" up here, and the rest of her family live in hiding as well in other parts of the country. Despite all of this, she continues to assist American forces as an interpreter. Her resolve is not shaken.

I bluntly asked her why she continues to aid coalition forces after all she experienced. Surely no one would blame her if she decided to call it quits. She replied that the American soldiers have sacrificed so much to help out her country, how could she refuse? That I myself and all the soldiers have left behind their families and have come over to Iraq to make her country free.

Her resolve and dedication were astounding and most humbling. I just thought I would share this story with all of you. I only wish you could have heard it from her own mouth."

Postscript: A church in the U.S. has raised money to bring this woman and her entire family to live in the States eventually.

Welcome Home 463rd Combat Engineers!

On Friday, December 2, the headquarters company (HHC) of the 463rd Combat Engineer battalion came home to Wheeling, WV after an 18-month deployment. OTA was present to welcome back these soldiers as they were reunited with their families for the first time in over a year.

Earlier in the spring, OTA sent a rock and roll band full of instruments to the 463rd, including acoustic, base and electric guitars, drums, keyboard and sound and mixing equipment. The unit enjoyed playing and listening to soldier musicians at concerts and church services.

Before returning to the U.S., the 463rd gave these instruments to their replacements so they too could enjoy the gift of music while deployed.

In appreciation for support shown to the 463rd while deployed, Lieutenant Colonel Hackett presented OTA with two appreciation plaques and a Commendation Coin.



Soldiers of the 463rd HHC form up in the Armory once more before final dismissal to their families.

Angel Defenders

Lei Hennessey-Owen, a nationally renowned sculptor and artist (and proud Marine mom!), has put her time and talents to use creating beautiful angels to commemorate the victims of 9/11 and pay tribute to our nation's military, participating in a recent event to honor PFC Jessica Lynch.

Planning to team up on a future project, Lei and OTA look forward to working together for the benefit of our troops. Learn more about Lei and her passion at www.deliveringangels.org

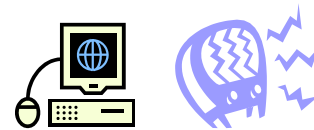


The sculpture "Freedom's Angel" was placed near the site of the Flight 93 crash in Shanksville, PA. She also made one for the World Trade Center and will be making one for the Pentagon.

Introducing Tunes 2 Troops

We've found we can accomplish so much more when no one cares who gets the credit. Because more troops will benefit from a broader and more united front of appreciation, OTA works with other groups and highlights other organizations that support our soldiers.

With that in mind, we introduce to you Tunes 2 Troops (T2T). Created in August of 2004 to offer American troops entertainment during their deployments, they started out collecting music, movies and electronic games for service members in Iraq. Now T2T strives to provide our troops with whatever they may need or want to improve their quality of life while they are away from the comforts of home and their loved ones. Visit them at <http://groups.msn.com/Tunes2Troops>.



OTA on global internet radio

Tune into "Talking with Heroes," an internet radio show that highlights military and support groups, debuting Dec 11, 2005 at 8:00 pm (EST). You can tune in at www.talkingwithheroes.com

Then on December 18, listen as OTA is one of the featured guests, along with musical great Charlie Daniels to talk about his new project called Operation Heartstrings.

All of the talk shows will be kept in archives and will be available 24/7 through the Talking With Heroes website.

Parent group YoungHeroes.US, and the Talking with Heroes show, is an evolving grass roots alliance of Americans from all walks of life, who want to show support for our troops, present and past and thank them for their service.

Supporting OTA

Since we are a non-governmental agency, OTA can only do its work for deployed soldiers with donations from generous individuals. Please tell your friends and family about us and make a donation if you can.

We are also accepting new or gently used DVDs, video games and unused phone cards. Donated items and tax deductible checks can be sent to:

Operation Troop Appreciation
PO Box 14550
Pittsburgh, PA 15234

Or make a donation securely on-line at:
www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org

