

# OBSERVATION Post

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MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER

JANUARY 9, 2009

SERVING THE TWENTYNINE PALMS COMMUNITY SINCE 1957

VOL. 1 ISSUE 1



**3** Tanks' Christmas on the right track



**4** PMO remembers RexO



**8-9** 2008: A look back



**13** Erasing the trauma

## This Day in Marine Corps History

- Jan. 4, 1991 -

Marine helicopters evacuate 281 people from U.S. Embassy at Mogadishu, Somalia.

# Watchdogs return just in time for Christmas

**LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA**

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Friends, families, and loved ones of the Marines and sailors of Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1 got an early Christmas present when an estimated 100 unit members returned home from Iraq to the unit's headquarters in building 1980 Dec. 19.

The Watchdogs, who departed from the Combat Center in mid-October, were tasked with supporting infantry units with surveillance, using their unmanned aerial systems, during convoys and patrols.

A detachment of 50 Marines are currently still supporting operations in Iraq, and will see out the full deployment, but the majority of the deploying force returned home to prepare for changing mission requirements.

The event was made extra special because Christmas 2008 will mark the first time the unit has been home for

See WATCHDOGS, A5

## 3/4 has special visit from MOH recipient and 3/4 Association

**LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON**

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Every year 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment Association representatives visit the Combat Center to present the battalion's noncommissioned officer of the year with an NCO Sword.

This year, in support of his old battalion, John J. McGinty, a Medal of Honor recipient and 3/4 Association member, attended the event and spoke to the Marines about the history of their battalion at the Sunset Cinema Jan 6.

McGinty received his Medal of

See MOH, A6



LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON

John J. McGinty, a Medal of Honor recipient and 3/4 Association member, presents Sgt. Mario Desalvo, a section leader with Weapons Company, 3/4, with a noncommissioned officer sword at the Sunset Cinema after Desalvo was announced NCO of the year for the battalion Jan. 6.



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

2nd Lt. Regan R. King, the communications officer for Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1, receives a hug from his daughter, Mackenzie, after returning to the Combat Center Dec. 19 at the Combat Center's Building 1980.

## Littleton Hall named Best in the West again

**LANCE CPL. M. C. NERL**

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Combat Center's Littleton Hall was named Best in the West in 2008 for the third year running since it was opened in February 2006.

Food service subject experts from Marine Corps Installations West judged the mess hall against all other West Coast facilities on the standards set by judges, said Bernard West, Littleton's operations manager and a native of San Bernardino, Calif.

"Many different aspects of the chow hall factor into how it is judged," said West. "Some of those are the employees, their customer service and presentation. Also, the presentation and preparation of food is looked at."

"The team also watches the preparation of the food to ensure that we do adhere to the recipes provided for all the different dishes we cook," he added.

West said Sodexho has run the facility since it was opened in 2006.

"Sodexho runs a good operation here," he said. "The company has been here almost three years since February of 2006. I myself have been working here since November of 2007, and it is a good place to work. I can see why they won the award three years straight."

West said he enjoys the satisfaction the award has given him and the rest of the Littleton staff.

"It is truly an honor to win this award," West said. "We all work hard here and it is just truly an honor for us to win it three years in a row."

Other Littleton workers share West's enthusiasm for the award their hard work has earned.

"We're all very proud of one another as a staff," said Arrie Weeks, a food service manager and a native of Santa Monica,

See CHOW, A5

Next week see the Observation Post make-over, a new look for a new year!

# Tax Center opens its doors

Tax season is approaching. Start collecting your tax information so you can visit the Tax Center to have your return prepared and electronically filed to the IRS, California and other states at no charge.

The Tax Center is not at the Village Center this year. The location is building 2080 on 13th Street, and is scheduled to open Jan. 20. Tax center hours are Monday through Friday from 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Appointments are recommended. From Monday through Wednesday, call Legal Assistance at 830-6111 to schedule. Beginning Thursday, call the Tax Center at 830-4829 to schedule. Walk-ins will be limited this year. Children are not allowed at the tax center. Please make arrangements for child care.

The first few weeks of the tax season are the busiest. Please bring a book or magazine to pass the time as taxpayers may have a wait.

A paid preparer charges approximately \$75-\$200 for preparation only and offers a refund anticipation loan so taxpayers get their refund instantly. Bank fees on these instant loans average \$70 to \$225 depending on the amount of your refund.

The Tax Center will prepare the return and get your refund deposited directly into your account in seven to 10 business days for free, saving you a total of \$145 to \$425. Be patient and don't rush to the paid preparers out in town.

These services are available to active duty, retirees and their qualifying family members. The Tax Center does not prepare returns with rental property, self-employment or complicated capital gains. If you itemize your deductions because you own your home or have other qualifying expenses like large charitable contributions, or need assistance with your prior year returns, Feb. 17 is the earliest the tax center will prepare your return because the initial rush will be over and tax documents continue to be received through early February.

A tax preparer will check in each service member or spouse and ensure all information is present before starting the filing process. Items needed are W-2's for all jobs worked for taxpayer and spouse; 1099s for interest or dividends earned in a bank or credit union; social security cards; full names and birth dates for everyone; day care provider's name; social security number or employee identification number; address; phone number and amount paid, myPay direct deposit printout or a blank check for direct deposit of refund, last year's tax return, original power of attorney, divorce decree or Form 8332 if claiming a child not living with you if needed, 1098-T if college tuition and fees were paid, and any other relevant information.

W-2's are available on the myPay Web site, <https://mypay.dfas.mil>. W-2s for Marines should be available as of Wednesday. All other active duty services are scheduled for Jan. 23 according to the myPay Web site.

Spouses who file tax returns for service members while deployed or unavailable must provide the original power of attorney authorizing the spouse to sign. If you do not know your spouse's military W-2 but have his or her personal identification number, print out the W-2 from the myPay website.

If you do not have the PIN, contact your spouse at your earliest convenience to obtain it. The Installation Personnel Administration Center will not issue PINs with a power of attorney.

If you do not have your spouse's power of attorney, please contact him or her and request a power of attorney. Your spouse can e-mail or fax you the W-2, but you still need the original power of attorney to sign the return. Computers are available on base with Internet access at Learning Resource Center in building 1527, the Lifelong Learning Center in building 1528 or Information and Referral in building 1551.

Single Marines who are new to the Marine Corps should talk to their parents before filing. Their parents are often entitled to claim him or her as a dependent. If the service member does not know this, the Internal Revenue Service will reject his or her parents' tax return.

Enlisted service members and warrant officers who served in a combat zone during 2008 for any part of a month will receive exclusion on their gross pay for all military pay received for that month. For commissioned officers who served, the maximum monthly exclusion is the highest enlisted pay, plus any hostile fire or imminent danger pay received.

Service members with combat zone injuries that were hospitalized are excluded from paying taxes on their gross income for the period of hospitalization up to two years after the last date they served in the combat zone, according to the IRS Web site, <http://www.irs.gov>.

For further information and to schedule appointments, please contact the Legal Assistance Office at 830-6111 or the tax center at 830-4829.

# YOU CAN CALL ME AL

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62					63				64				

© MacNamara's Band, Inc.

### ACROSS

- 1. Deal from the bottom, e.g.
- 6. "Miracle" team of 1969
- 10. Gullible sorts
- 14. Painter Picasso
- 15. River to the Caspian Sea
- 16. Natural soother
- 17. "An Inconvenient Truth" presenter
- 19. In the buff
- 20. Toupees, slangily
- 21. Gave a heads-up to
- 23. Cowardly sorts
- 27. Tough to resolve
- 28. Curtis of haircare
- 29. County, in Louisiana
- 32. Ill-suited
- 33. Unlike a dirt road
- 34. Chang's twin
- 37. Fork-tailed flier
- 38. King in "The Passion of the Christ"

- 39. Practice with a pug
- 40. Merino mother
- 41. Front-end alignment concern
- 42. Hiccups cure, supposedly
- 43. Needs a bib
- 45. In short supply
- 46. Lord's realm
- 48. Use for support
- 49. Sum total
- 51. Sharif of film
- 52. Summons a genie, perhaps
- 53. American Dance Theater founder
- 59. Fortuneteller's words
- 60. Snake's posture
- 61. Aaron, for most of his career
- 62. Fish caught in pots
- 63. London's \_\_\_ Park
- 64. Jazz combo instruments

### DOWN

- 1. Tax pro
- 2. Shakespearean prince
- 3. Flow back
- 4. Hoppy brew
- 5. Driving rain
- 6. TV chimp J. Fred\_\_
- 7. Lustful god
- 8. La Brea stuff
- 9. Did in
- 10. Buffalo skaters
- 11. First American in space
- 12. Tiny openings
- 13. Run-down
- 18. Correct the pitch of
- 22. At the center of
- 23. Water park feature
- 24. Extend, in a way
- 25. Inventor of dynamite
- 26. Mineral deposit
- 29. Left Bank locale
- 30. Stratford's river

- 31. Part of "Roy G. Biv"
- 33. Do a KP chore
- 35. Pusher's pursuer
- 36. Eco-conscious
- 38. Sob syllable
- 39. Check the price of
- 41. Unable to decide
- 42. Brilliantly colored beetles
- 44. Shakes awake
- 45. Kid on "South Park"
- 46. Mme. Tussaud
- 47. Elicit chuckles from
- 48. Mona Lisa feature
- 50. RPM gauge
- 51. "Ars Amatoria" poet
- 54. Moviedom's Myrna
- 55. Nest egg letters
- 56. Far from strict
- 57. Time to revel, perhaps
- 58. "You betcha!"

## Centerspeak

### Who do you think will win the Super Bowl this year and why?

*Opinions expressed in Centerspeak are not necessarily those of the OBSERVATION POST, the Marine Corps or Department of Defense.*



**ENSIGN DANIEL GARCIA**  
EMERGENCY ROOM NURSE,  
ROBERT E. BUSH NAVAL HOSPITAL

"Giant came off champions last year, that's why they're going to repeat."



**CPL. DEMETRIUS DUQLAR**  
ROLE PLAYER AT TTECG MQUAVE VIPER SECTION

"Tennessee because they've been doing so good, they'll rise to the occasion this year."



**STAFF SGT. LARRY CARVER JR.**  
DETACHMENT MILITARY POLICE COMPANY  
WAHPETON, N.D.

"I think the Chargers are going to win. They're my team and that's what I want for them."

## Employee Spotlight

**Name:** Monique Irene Tapio  
**Organization:** Enterprise Rent-A-Car at the Combat Center  
**Job Title:** Assistant Manager  
**Job Duties:** Open and close the store, retail sales, unit requests, corporate accounts, working with base contracting.



**What Do You Like Most About Your Job?** The flexibility Enterprise provides and all the different people I get to meet.

**Significant Achievements:** Helping the shop win Fleet Growth Awards, Exceptional Achievement Awards, and a Letter of Appreciation.

**Hobbies:** Reading

**Military Service:** None, wife of Gunnery Sgt. Myron D. Tapio, Company B Master Gunner, 1st Tank Battalion.

**Time At The Combat Center:** Three years

## OBSERVATION POST

**Commanding General Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus**

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THURS. 1/8 – MON. 1/19	FRI. 1/9	SAT. 1/10	SAT. 1/10	SUN. 1/11
<b>20th Annual Palm Springs International Film Festival</b> Time: All day event Where: Various Palm Springs locations For more info, call 322-2930 or (800) 898-7256, or log on to <a href="http://www.psfilmfest.org">http://www.psfilmfest.org</a>	<b>Blues After Hours</b> Time: 5 – 9 p.m. Where: Cafe Potpourri at the Carriage Inn, 901 N. China Lake Blvd., Ridgecrest For more info, call 446-7910 or log on to <a href="http://www.carriageinn.biz">http://www.carriageinn.biz</a>	<b>Palm Springs Certified Farmer's Market</b> Time: 8 a.m. – 12 p.m. Where: Palm Springs Certified Farmers Market 2300 E Baristo Road at Farrell, Palm Springs For more info, call 898-5250	<b>Comedienne Sarah Silverman and Friends</b> Time: 8 p.m. Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino 84245 Indio Springs Parkway, Indio. For more info, call 342-5000 or log on to <a href="http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com">http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com</a>	<b>Chris Walters Acoustic Old School Blues</b> Time: 7 p.m. Where: 29 Palms Inn 73950 Inn Ave., 29 Palms For more info, call 367-3505 or log on to <a href="http://www.29palmsinn.com">http://www.29palmsinn.com</a>
MON. 1/12	WED. 1/14	THURS. 1/15	FRI. 1/16	FRI. 1/16 – SUN. 1/18
<b>Polynesian Dance Class</b> Time: 7 – 8 p.m. Where: Joshua Tree Community Center Joshua Tree Community Center, 6171 Sunburst Road Joshua Tree. For more info, call 366-8415	<b>Open Mic Karaoke</b> Time: 7 p.m. Where: Spotlight 29 Casino 46-200 Harrison St. Coachella For more info, call (800) 585-3737 or log on to <a href="http://www.spotlight29.com">http://www.spotlight29.com</a>	<b>Free Evening at Palm Springs Art Museum</b> Time: 4 – 8 p.m. Where: Palm Springs Art Museum, 101 Museum Dr. Palm Springs. For more info, call 322-4000 or log on to <a href="http://www.psmuseum.org">http://www.psmuseum.org</a>	<b>Riding w/ the 7th Cavalry, Indian Wars</b> Time: 11:30 a.m. Where: Mission Hills Country Club 34600 Mission Hills Drive Rancho Mirage. For more info, call 322-0260	<b>22nd Annual Blythe Bluegrass Festival</b> Time: All day event Where: Colorado River Fairgrounds, 11995 Olive Lake Bl., Blythe. For more info, call 922-8166 or log on to <a href="http://www.blythebluegrass.com">http://www.blythebluegrass.com</a>

# 1st Tank Battalion rolls Santa Claus in for the holidays

**CPL. MARGARET HUGHES**

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

Marines, sailors and families of 1st Tank Battalion kicked off the holiday season with a party and a visit from Santa Claus Dec. 18 at the battalion's maintenance bay aboard the Combat Center.

The annual party was a way for the battalion to come together for the holiday season and to help improve camaraderie and troop welfare, said 1st Lt. Matthew Kelly, the battalion adjutant.

"We want to let everyone know they are appreciated to include our sailors and families," Kelly said.

The event had multiple activities including moon bounces, gladiator jousting and a mechanical bull to keep everyone of all ages entertained.

Once the party started, a crowd gathered around the mechanical bull to see their friends and leaders get bucked off, while others watched their little ones jump in moon bounces.

Lt. Col. Thomas Gordon, the

battalion commander, invited everyone to a buffet and to listen to a few words about the importance of the party.

"This is our opportunity to come together today," Gordon said. "Enjoy fellowship and friendship and spend quality time with your families."

After the benediction, everyone was able to share a wonderful holiday meal together that emphasizes

the meaning of the holiday season.

"Christmas is a great time for families and friends," said Lt. Matthew Price, the battalion chaplain. "It's time to share love with the military family and personal families. Our thoughts and prayers go to those overseas who are not able to spend this time with their families."

The children heard an announcement they all had been

waiting for, Santa and his elves were on their way to the party on a M1A1 Abrams Main Battle Tank, escorted by seven motorcycles.

Santa arrived at the bay greeted by children with open arms. He dismounted and made his way over to his throne to greet all of the chil-

dren, give them a gift and take a picture with them on his knee.

With children opening their toys and others finishing their dinner, everyone left with a full stomach and a smile on their face to set the mood for the start of a happy holiday season.



LANCER CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Lt. Col. Thomas J. Gordon, commanding officer of 1st Tank Battalion, and Santa Claus wave to Combat Center motorists on Del Valle Dr. while making their way to the battalion's annual Christmas Party Dec. 18.



CPL. MARGARET HUGHES

Maj. David Bardorf, 1st Tank Battalion's executive officer, takes a ride on a mechanical bull during the battalion's holiday party Dec. 18 aboard the Combat Center. The annual party was a way for the unit to come together for the holiday season.

# PMO mourns loss of canine comrade

LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The Provost Marshal's Office suffered the loss of a beloved friend and brother-in-arms in late December, when RexO, a military working dog with PMO, passed away after succumbing to health problems.

RexO, and his handler, Lance Cpl. Zakaria Kahamleh, were tasked with locating narcotics on and off base, and assisting PMO patrolmen along with local law enforcement agencies.

"Professionally we worked really well together," said Kahamleh, a native of Sacramento, Calif.

Kahamleh also said because the dogs and their handlers do not serve their entire enlistments together due to changing mission requirements, and because of the dangers the pair may encounter, handlers are advised not to become attached to their canine partners.

While Kahamleh said he understood this reasoning, he did not hesitate to say he loved his former friend and partner RexO.

"I was pretty attached to him," said Kahamleh, who had been RexO's handler since August 2008. "I would be lying if I said I wasn't attached to him."

Cpl. Daniel Swafford, a working dog trainer who helped train RexO, said it was sad to see a young dog like RexO pass away at such a young age.

"It's just rough seeing one of your dogs go," said Swafford. "It's like losing a family member."



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

The Provost Marshal's Office is currently mourning the loss of RexO, a military working dog who passed away in late December. RexO, and his handler, Lance Cpl. Zakaria Kahamleh, were tasked with locating narcotics on and off base, and assisting PMO patrolmen and local law enforcement agencies.

RexO, one of four canines at the Combat Center specializing in narcotics, was a young working dog with a bright future and had the potential to become a good narcotics canine, said Swafford.

Kahamleh said one fond memory of RexO he has is when he and RexO aided local law enforcement officials in Yucca Valley, Calif., after the civilian offi-

cers had pulled over a motorist.

RexO proved his worth by leading the officers directly to a spot in the vehicle where they found small traces of illegal drugs, said Kahamleh.

Kahamleh also said while RexO was less aggressive and easier going off duty than some of his canine colleagues, another fond memory he held was when the two participated

in aggression drills because of RexO's enthusiasm and strong bite.

This combination of aggression, loyalty, and easy going attitude, led to a working dog that his handler felt was 100 percent reliable and would do whatever it took to serve Corps and country, and ensure the Combat Center and the local community are safe and secure.

## ASYMCA 'Operation Hero' kicks off for 10 week session

ARMED SERVICES YMCA

TWENTYNINE PALMS BRANCH

The Armed Services YMCA is gearing up to begin another fun-filled 10-week session of "Operation Hero." The ASYMCA is now accepting applications for the next Operation Hero session, which starts Monday. The program runs twice a week from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Students in the second through sixth grade

attending Condor Elementary participate in the Operation Hero program on Mondays and Wednesdays, while students from Twentynine Palms Elementary meet Tuesdays and Thursdays. There is a \$20 fee for the program, which helps to cover snacks and supplies.

During the Operation Hero program, children receive help with homework, take part in character-building activities,

earn superbucks for cool prizes, and get the chance to build lasting friendships with other military children. We have seen many kids whose behavior has dramatically changed after only a few weeks of Operation Hero classes. The goal of Operation Hero is to benefit and provide support to military parents and children alike.

The previous Operation Hero session, which ran from Sept. 23 to Dec. 3, included 14 students from Condor and Twentynine Palms Elementary schools. Some highlights from the past session included "Heritage Day," where each child brought a food from their family's heritage; "Friendship Day", where children made charm bracelets for friends and family; and, the children's all time favorite, "Nickelodeon Day" which was full of fun and crazy games. We've received raving reviews from parents, who said that their child's participation in the program has helped them to express themselves more openly, improved their study skills and interaction with peers and teachers, and increased their self confidence.

After receiving their Operation Hero Graduation certificates, the participants may sign up for the follow-up ASYMCA program, the Kids Care Club, which runs

continuously throughout the school year. Its purpose is to provide children the opportunity to give back to the military and local community through a variety of projects while discovering the joy and gratification in helping others. In October and November, the Kids Care Club honored those serving in the armed forces by making over 200 candy bouquets, care packages, and hand-made cards, which they then delivered to the Marines and sailors training at Camp Wilson who were unable to attend the Marine Corps birthday celebrations. In December, the Kids Care Club made 46 hand-made Christmas gifts and cards for Reach Out Morongo Basin's Christmas Eve dinner. Kids Care Club has many more projects in the works, including "Valentines for Vets," "Gifts for Kids at Loma Linda," and "Easter Baskets for CPA Kids."

If you would like to enroll your child in the next session of Operation Hero or would like more information, you can call the ASYMCA at 830-7481, or stop by the ASYMCA in building 192, which is across from Carl's Jr. and next to the ASYMCA thrift store. You can also send an e-mail to operationhero.kcc@roadrunner.com.

## HOT TOPICS

### JAN. 26, 27, 28: DEERS CLOSURE

The DEERS Office will be completely closed Jan. 26-28 for the installation of hardware upgrades. Please plan accordingly, as ID card operations will be unavailable. For more information, call 830-5365.

### JAN. 26, 27: MMEA TO VISIT COMBAT CENTER

The Headquarters Marine Corps Marine Manpower Enlisted Assignments Branch will visit the Combat Center Jan. 26 to 27 to afford enlisted Marines the opportunity to have direct personal communication with their respective occupational field monitor for potential future assignments. Opportunities for FTAP 2009 and STAP 2009 Marines to receive on-the-spot assignments and reenlistment authority will also be provided by the MMEA visit. For more information, refer to MARADMIN 413/08.

### FEB. 19: RECRUITER SCREENING TEAM TO VISIT COMBAT CENTER

The Headquarters Marine Corps Recruiter Screening Team will visit the Combat Center Feb. 19 to screen pre-designated enlisted Marines for potential future assignment on recruiting duty.

### HOSPITAL LAB PROCEDURES FOR OUTSIDE REQUESTS CHANGES

As of Oct. 1, the Naval Hospital Twentynine Palms laboratory will no longer be accepting outside provider requests for lab work. This decision was made with patient safety and privacy as the primary reason. Laboratory personnel will assist you in locating alternative sources of lab work if necessary. When visiting your civilian provider, ask which laboratory service they use. There are several satellite facilities in the area that support our TriWest network providers. Contact the TRI-CARE Service Center here in the hospital if you have questions or concerns about your testing process. The hospital's goal is to ensure the highest standard of care for you and your family. If you have questions and or concerns, please contact Lt. Cmdr. Baker at 830-2149.

**WATCHDOGS, from A1**

the holiday season in four years.

"It's just in time for Christmas," said Maria Toves, wife of VMU-1 sergeant major, Sgt. Maj. William P. Toves. "It's perfect."

Toves, a native of Long Beach, Calif., said she was thankful that her husband's fourth deployment was quick and was looking forward to surprising her mother-in-law, who was unaware of her son's return, this holiday season.



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Robyn Jimenez, fiancé of Master Sgt. Rudolph Arreola, a maintenance chief with Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1, waits anxiously as she waits for Arreola's return Dec. 19 at the Combat Center's building 1980.

Toni Meister, wife of Lance Cpl. John Meister, a motor vehicle operator with Company V, said she too was happy that the deployment was so short since the couple are newlyweds.

The Globe, Ariz., native, who moved to the Combat Center on Dec. 15, said the last two months were somewhat frustrating and nerve-wracking due to the absence of day-to-day communication, but has accepted that as being part of the military community and is still support-

ive of her husband and his unit.

Hector Baisa, who was waiting for the return of his son, Lance Cpl. Derrick Baisa, an aviation supply specialist with Company V, said he was very proud of his son and happy to have him back safe and sound.

Baisa, an El Paso, Texas, native, who served in the Marine Corps in the late 60's and early 70's, said he understood his son's anxiousness to do his part as a warfighter, but was grateful for the gift of his son this Christmas season.

"We're going to have him back with us, do a lot of things together, and enjoy the time we have with him," said Baisa.

Elizabeth O'Quinn, wife of Staff Sgt. Leroy O'Quinn, a communications chief with Company V, who attended the homecoming with the couple's three children, said she cried when she found out her husband was coming home.

"This will be our first Christmas together in three years, so we are excited to have him back," said O'Quinn, a native of Long Beach, Calif.

The homecoming was even more special for the couple's 5-year-old son, Jordyn, who celebrated a birthday earlier in the week and therefore received both a birthday and Christmas present in the form of his father's return.



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gary Crawford, the assistant maintenance officer for Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 1, is welcomed home by his daughter, Lillian, and wife, Leetrianne, at VMU-1's homecoming Dec. 19 at the Combat Center's building 1980.



LANCE CPL. M. C. NERL

Sgt. Amih Zinnerman and Bernard West hold Littleton mess hall's award for being named Best in the West. Littleton was named Best in the West for the third consecutive year after being judged by food service subject matter experts from Marine Corps Installation West.

**CHOW, from A1**

Calif. "We've had the same staff for the most part since we opened here. It really is the staff, cooks, managers and all the military personnel we have here that make this a good place."

Weeks added she believes their success is a result of teamwork.

"Every member of every section is vital to the performance of the business," Weeks said. "All of us work together. Everyone is crucial, from the people who scrub the floor to the people who do the maintenance on the refrigerators and other things."

It truly makes the job easier for everyone involved when the team works together as well as it did, Weeks added.

Liz Nuniz, who is also a food service manager for Littleton added her personal satisfaction comes from knowing her job is important to the service members on the base.

"It really feels good to give back to the Marines for what they do every day," said Nuniz, who comes from Oceanside, Calif.

Nuniz added part of her job she enjoys the most is doing it well.

"You feel very proud to get recognized for simply giving back to the military members aboard the base," she said. "Our job here other than feeding people is to make them welcome and allow them to enjoy their meals."

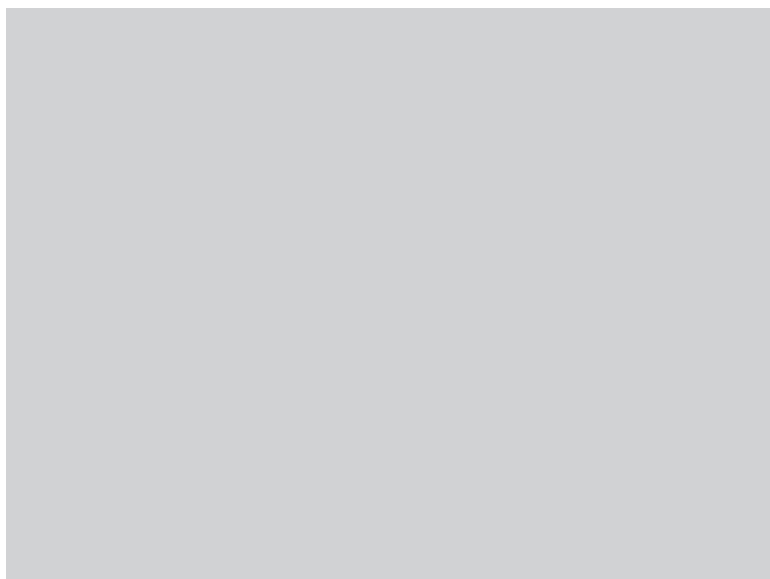
Littleton's patrons also enjoy the mess hall, which gives credit to the award received.

Pfc. Daniel M. Salig, who is a student with Marine Corps

Communications-Electronics School in Company A, regularly eats at Littleton.

"I typically eat at the chow hall," said Salig, who comes from San Clemente, Calif. "They serve good food there. Also the employees are friendly and it is very convenient because of how close it is to my barracks."

With Littleton already selected as the Best in the West the award will be formally presented to them later this year.





LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON  
John J. McGinty, a Medal of Honor recipient and 3/4 Association member, fires a modified carbon dioxide-powered weapon at a simulation screen at the Laser Shot demonstration during their visit to the Combat Center Jan. 6.

### MOH, from A1

Honor for courage under fire. Despite his own wounds, he rallied his Marines and charged through enemy fire to rescue two squads of Marines. Using his pistol, he killed five oncoming attackers and adjusted artillery and air strikes within 50 yards of his position, killing more than 500 enemy soldiers.

Sgt. Mario Desalvo, section leader, Weapons Company, 3/4, was the recognized Marine during the ceremony.

"It was an honor to receive the sword from a Medal of Honor recipient," said Desalvo, a

Broomfield, Colo., native. "It was more significant and helped show me what I strive to be."

Desalvo said he proved to be the NCO of the year by putting 100 percent into his job and Marines.

"A true test of any leader is the performance of junior Marines in the absence of their leader," said Desalvo. "My Marines proved that saying."

Before the ceremony, McGinty and the association members had the opportunity to tour the Combat Center and view all the changes the base has gone through throughout the years.

The Phelps Hall dining facility was the first stop for the visiting veteran's tour.

They had an opportunity to eat

lunch with enlisted Marines, discussing changes in the Marine Corps since the Vietnam War.

"I'm really excited to have the opportunity to come out and see the battalion, especially the great Marines from Kilo Company," said McGinty, a Boston native who served as a staff NCO with Company K in Vietnam. "I have been to Iraq and Afghanistan to help boost moral to the service members, but this is my first chance to actually be with the Marines from my old battalion."

After lunch, the group made their way to a shooting demonstration by Laser

Shot, which gave the former Marines an opportunity to fire modified carbon dioxide-pow-

ered weapons at a simulation screen. Each member of the association had a chance to fire on different simulated terrains, scenarios, and targets.

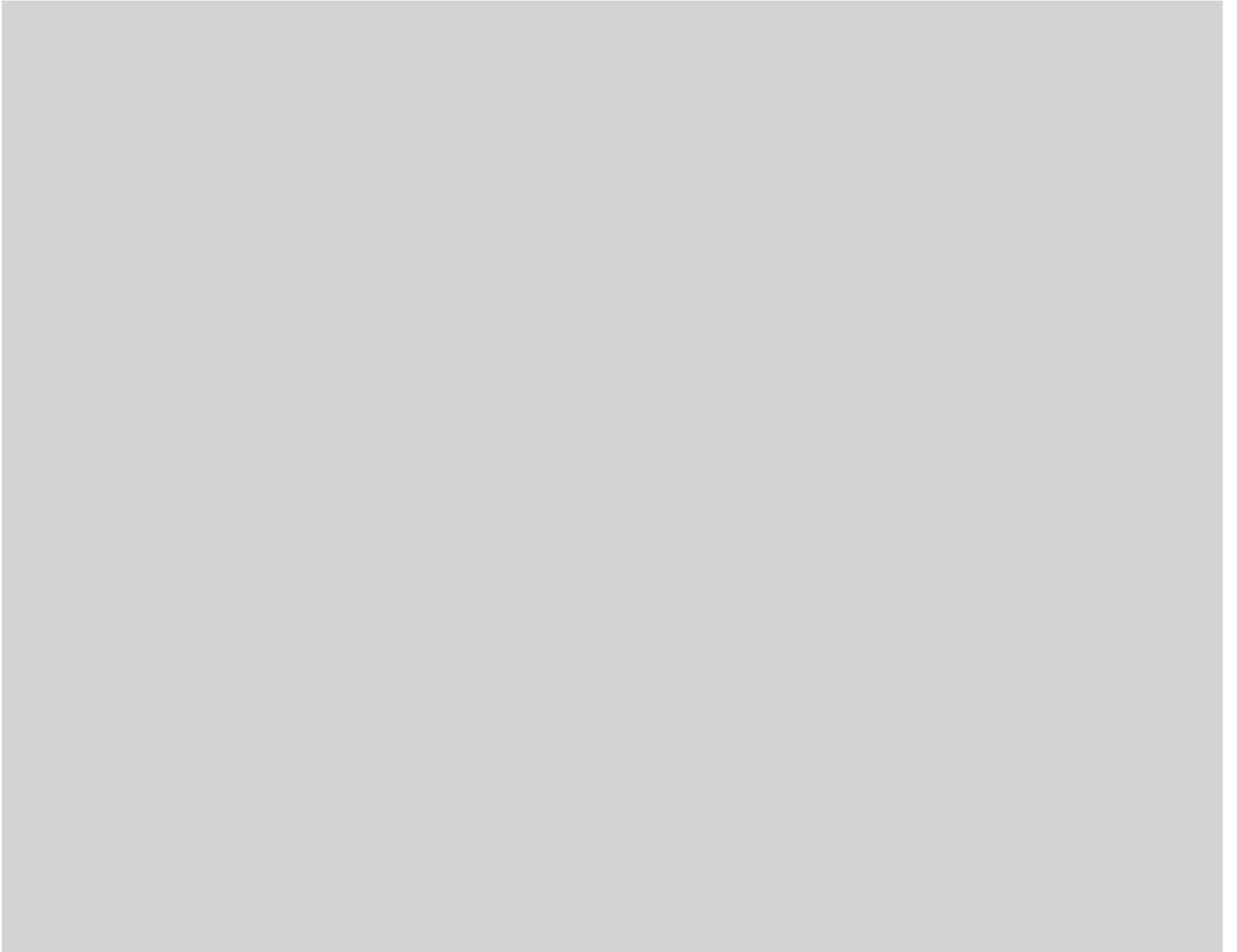
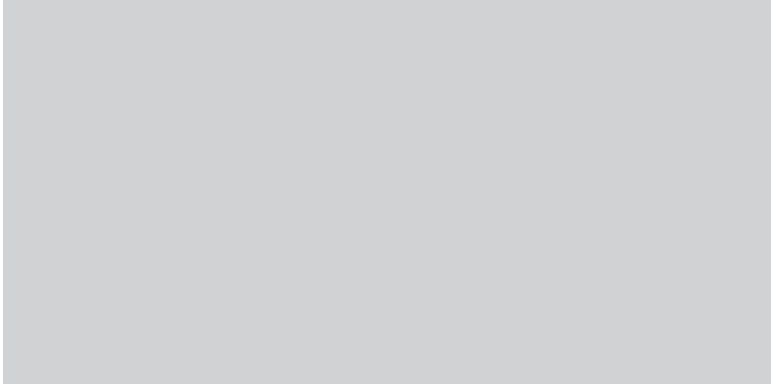
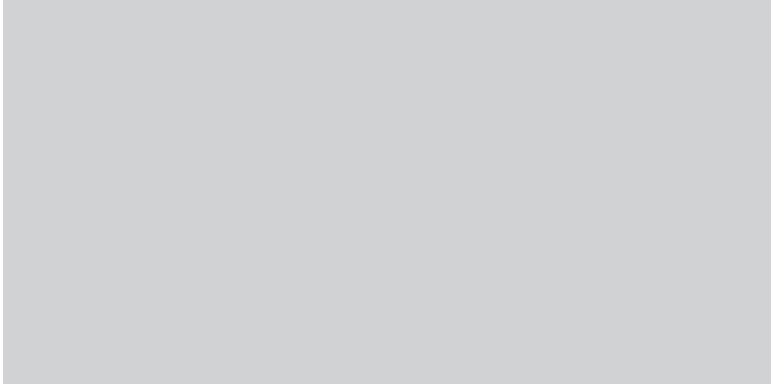
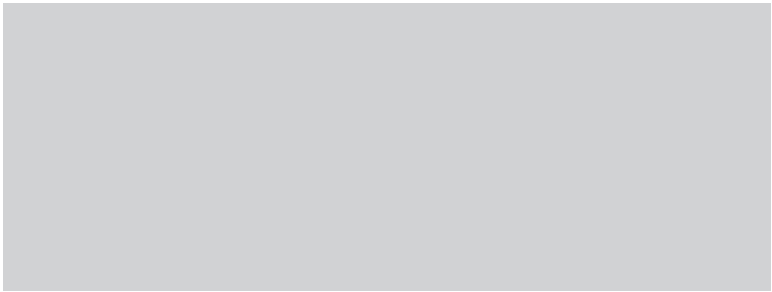
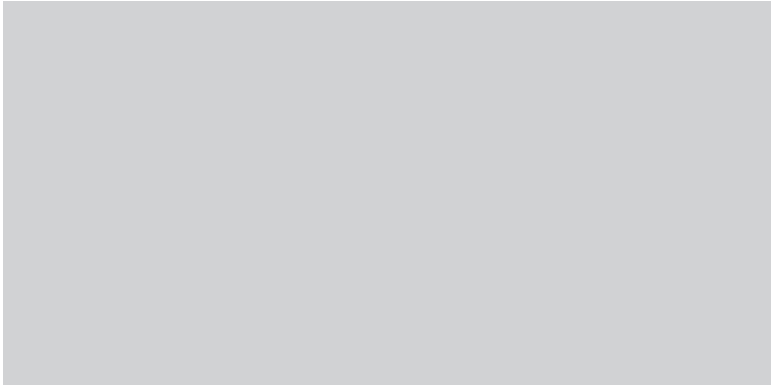
Cpl. Edman Escallada, a team leader for Company L, 3/4, who helped prepare the simulation for the small tour, said he was honored to be able to meet and talk to a Medal of Honor recipient from the same battalion.

"Any Medal of Honor recipient is an honor to meet, but to be able to talk to one from the same battalion as me made it even better," said Escallada, an Indio, Calif., native. "It is especially good for the Marines to be able to see the comparison of what they do and what he has done. He is showing them that they can be great just like him."

Since the Marine Corps did not have the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program during the Vietnam War, the last stop of the tour consisted of the veteran getting a MCMAP demonstration from Staff Sgt. William Loushin, a platoon sergeant and a second degree black belt with 3/4.

Loushin impressed the veterans by taking down four opponents within minutes while using different MCMAP techniques.

At the end of the day, McGinty signed autographs and answered questions about his time in the battalion while leaving the Marines with a glimpse into their battalion's past, and knowing they are thought of and cared for.



# Exceptional Family Member Program questions answered

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Below are the responses to questions raised at an Exceptional Family Member Program Town Hall Meeting held Sept. 22. Unless indicated, all answers have been provided by Marine Corps Community Services or G4. *Some questions were not published in order to preserve privacy.*

**Q. Please compile a comprehensive welcome aboard package. If there is already one in place then update it to include a dedicated segment informing families about EFMP services and who/how to contact for more detailed information.**

**A:** We already have a comprehensive welcome aboard package which includes a flyer explaining the EFMP program and has the phone number listed. This flyer explains what conditions may make you eligible for this program and who is eligible. We also have an EFMP rep at the welcome aboard briefs.

**Q. Is a Marine disqualified from recruiting duty if a dependant is Category 4 EFMP?**

**A:** Being a Cat 4 does not disqualify a Marine from recruiting duty. It is based on the needs of the family and whether or not those facilities are available at that location.

**Q. Can the base hire a specialist to teach social skills to EFMP children who need assistance in this area?**

**A:** Currently EFMP families are sent out on TRICARE for occupational/physical therapy. If we are speaking to autistic children on Applied Behavior Analysis, (we currently have five families that qualify for this program) If enrolled they receive up to \$2500 a month for therapy, this usually requires 20 to 40 hours of ABA therapy per month the closest provider is in San Bernardino. We are currently working with Naval Hospital and TRICARE to see if we can use funds to pay for the parents to be trained in administering ABA therapy.

**Q. There is a special education program in Joshua Tree that many parents have had to research on their own. What can be done to better advertise this?**

**A:** The special education program is throughout the Morongo Basin School District. At Joshua Tree Elementary we have more of the behavioral needs children. Each need is addressed via a special classroom dedicated to those students and their needs (i.e. children on the

autistic spectrum tend to be in Friendly Hills where there is a male teacher for one classroom and a female teacher for another, in the hopes that each student will have a teacher to relate to.) We are in the process of including this information on our Web site.

**Q. Several families go without services for several months. Some families report that the school system has been completely uncooperative regarding EFMP and special needs. What is the command's assessment?**

**A:** We have not found the school district is uncooperative regarding EFMP families with special needs. We have found just the opposite. We currently have a family that has four special needs children and a dad deployed, the school district made arrangements to have a small bus pick all the children up and take them to two different schools. This bus is dispatched solely for these four children. We are aware of the speech therapist issue at Twentynine Palms Elementary. The district is working to find a replacement, in the meantime we have advised those families to take their IEPs to their doctor and have the doctor annotate that the child needs "additional speech therapy above and beyond what the IEP states." This makes speech therapy a medical issue and the family is able to go through Tri-Care to get additional speech therapy. We are not aware of any family being turned away after following these steps.

**Q. It seems that the only diagnosis that school districts pay heed to regarding EFMP/Special needs is from a developmental physician at Balboa and these meetings take up to six months to schedule. Is there any other place other than Balboa that school districts will recognize?**

**A:** NHTP answered: Diagnoses are expected to be completed by a Medical Doctor. School districts should not restrict families to the two doctors at Balboa. Services for refined diagnosing is available at Loma Linda, Naval Medical Center San Diego and a new resource in Rancho Mirage; the waitlists for Developmental Pediatricians can be several months but these avenues should be recognized by the school district. According to Karen Taylor, Camp Pendleton EFMP case worker, this restriction could be a violation of patient rights. Ms. Taylor is an additional resource to our own 29 Palms, EFMP Manager Mr. Burns, 830-

8798. A Special Education website for more information on rights is <http://www.wrightslaw.com>.

**Q. It seems that doctors are not telling families to register with EFMP as soon as the Doctor finds out they are eligible. What can be done to correct this?**

**A:** There are currently no mechanisms in place to validate family education of EFMP status specifically occurred. This can possibly be included in the interview process. The fundamental issue is ensuring that the child in question is accessioned into appropriate, timely therapy for the given or suspected diagnosis. Completion of the EFMP paperwork does not normally affect this provision of care in the early stages following PCS arrival. Situations where early EFMP completion is important include scenarios when the family requires respite care for a particular diagnosis (eg: autistic spectrum disorder) or if architectural/housing considerations are needed pursuant to a disability.

**Q. One Marine family stated that TRICARE does not allow the family to go outside the system for specialized help, even if they are willing to pay out of pocket. Is this factual?**

**A:** TRIWEST/TRICARE does allow for persons to go outside of the system to network providers. In his situation, the primary care manager writes a consult, the consult goes to the utilization manager or reviewer. The UM will approve the consult allowing the patient to be seen by a network provider (a healthcare provider who has agreed to accept TRICARE payments at TRICARE payment rates). If the beneficiary desires to see a specialist not designated as a network provider and is enrolled in TRICARE Prime, the beneficiary is typically not allowed to visit a non-network provider unless authorized by the regional contractor. If the beneficiary does, they will pay higher out-of-pocket costs under the point-of-service option. The POS option allows you to receive non-emergency care from any TRICARE-authorized provider without requesting a referral from your primary care manager. However, POS has higher out-of-pocket costs for care.

**Q. Several families have had difficulty transitioning smoothly to Twentynine Palms, specifically housing. Problems include inquiring about special housing needs to include exterior/interior locks, handles in the bath tub. No assistance was provided for**

**several months. Does this process need to be improved?**

**A:** The majority of the time, housing is not aware that an incoming family is in the EFMP until the member checks in. Once the EFMP coordinator notifies us and we are aware that a family needs special equipment, either Lincoln Military Housing or FSSI will provide the requested improvements. The problem arises when a family arrives and finds out that a house is not immediately available, with improvements in place, and are unhappy that they have to wait for quarters. The normal response time to make improvements is usually the next day as long as the materials are on hand, or as soon as the material is received. As soon as Family Housing checks an EFMP family into quarters, regardless of category, the required improvements are scheduled.

**Q. What is the priority for EFMP family members in housing?**

**A:** All EFMP members do not get priority assignment to quarters. Only EFMP category 4 members are placed at the top of the list, below the freeze zone. All others go on the list as of their normal control date. There are only 151 single story quarters aboard the base and the waiting list is usually fairly long for this category of house.

**Q. Are EFMP houses being given to non-EFMP families?**

**A:** Currently Lincoln Military Housing only has one set of quarters that is handicapped equipped; wheelchair ramps etc. That set of quarters is only offered to families with those requirements. All single story homes on the base and the 30 in Vista del Sol are ADA compliant, but are offered to non-ADA families if there are no ADA families next on the list. This is done because HQMC requires that the units be occupied for utilization reasons and not be allowed to remain empty.

**Q. Can a "non-forced" move (for safety issues) be done by TMO for EFMP families being moved due to need?**

**A:** Short answer, yes, for safety and/or health reasons. TMO could arrange a government move of a member's household goods.

The longer answer would have the caveat that this would have to be directed by "competent authority" and not just to accommodate the member's personal problems, convenience, or morale.

**Q. For EFMP families executing a PCS move, can they remain in their quarters on their old duty station until quarters at the new duty station become available?**

**A:** This is something we can probably work out locally, but realize that the families may be separated for up to a year depending on the waiting list time at the new duty station.

A member's PCS household goods move entitlement is valid until a new set of orders is issued unless the member is PCSing to OCONUS and then the member must have at least 12 months remaining on their OCONUS tour in order to arrange for an OCONUS household goods ship-

ment. So, yes, TMO could wait to arrange a household goods move while the member awaited EFMP housing at the new duty station. TMO, of course, has no say in who lives in what quarters or how long they do so.

**Q. A Marine graduating from MCCES had an EFMP dependent. They were not in receipt of orders despite being less than a month out from graduation; this was prevented them from requesting special needs/housing requirements.**

**A:** Answered by MCCES. We are dependent on the HQMC monitors and work through our S1 and IPAC when dealing with student orders. Typically orders arrive one to two weeks before graduation. As soon as the orders post on the web, our S1 and IPAC work to provide the Marines their initial orders brief so they can make PCS arrangements. Typically the initial brief happens within three days of orders notification.

If the Marine has a special case, he needs to identify this issue to the MCCES S1 and we can work the monitor to resolve any order issues.

**Q. Why can't TRICARE Standard be seen by NHTP?**

**A:** TRICARE does not set policy for TRICARE Standard patients. NHTP's rule is TRICARE Standard beneficiaries will be seen on a Space Available basis. Since about one-third of our appointments are filled for same day appointments, many TRICARE Standard beneficiaries stand a good chance of being able to be seen at NHTP. TRICARE Standard beneficiaries opt out of TRICARE Prime by TRICARE Management Activity rules NHTP is not allowed to enroll them to a PCM, but make space available appointments for the TRICARE Standard beneficiary.

Can EFMP offer a family support group and also e-mail all members so that they are aware of Town Hall and other meetings?

**A:** We do a mass email to our family members as well as call to inform the families of town hall meetings. We are working to incorporate various methods of contacting family members for EFMP events. We are working to distribute notification through the family readiness officers as well. This will also assist in getting information to the families. We are preparing to start a local EFMP support group.

**Q. Is there a special needs program at the school on base? If not, what are the requirements to implement one?**

**A:** Again - the program is throughout the District. At this time, it will not be placed at Condor due to the needs of all the students in the District. In order to better utilize the resources the District has the concept of just having the program at Condor would limit the resources available to families that are not military affiliated and again would limit the progress of all children in the District. At this time, the District has broken the program up to be grade appropriate instruction and classes- this is a much better system than what was in place prior. Again, the school may not be right on the base but they do have transportation for our students to those schools.

# 2008: A Year in Review...



LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA

Marines and sailors of 3rd LAR stand at attention during the playing of Taps at the memorial service for Lance Cpl. Drew W. Weaver who was killed in Iraq Feb 21.



LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON

The Drum and Bugle Corps drum major directs his Marines during their performance at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field Feb. 29. They played an assortment of traditional Marine Corps music including a well-known band standard "Malagueña" by Ernesto Lecuona.



LANCE CPL. MONICA C. ERICKSON

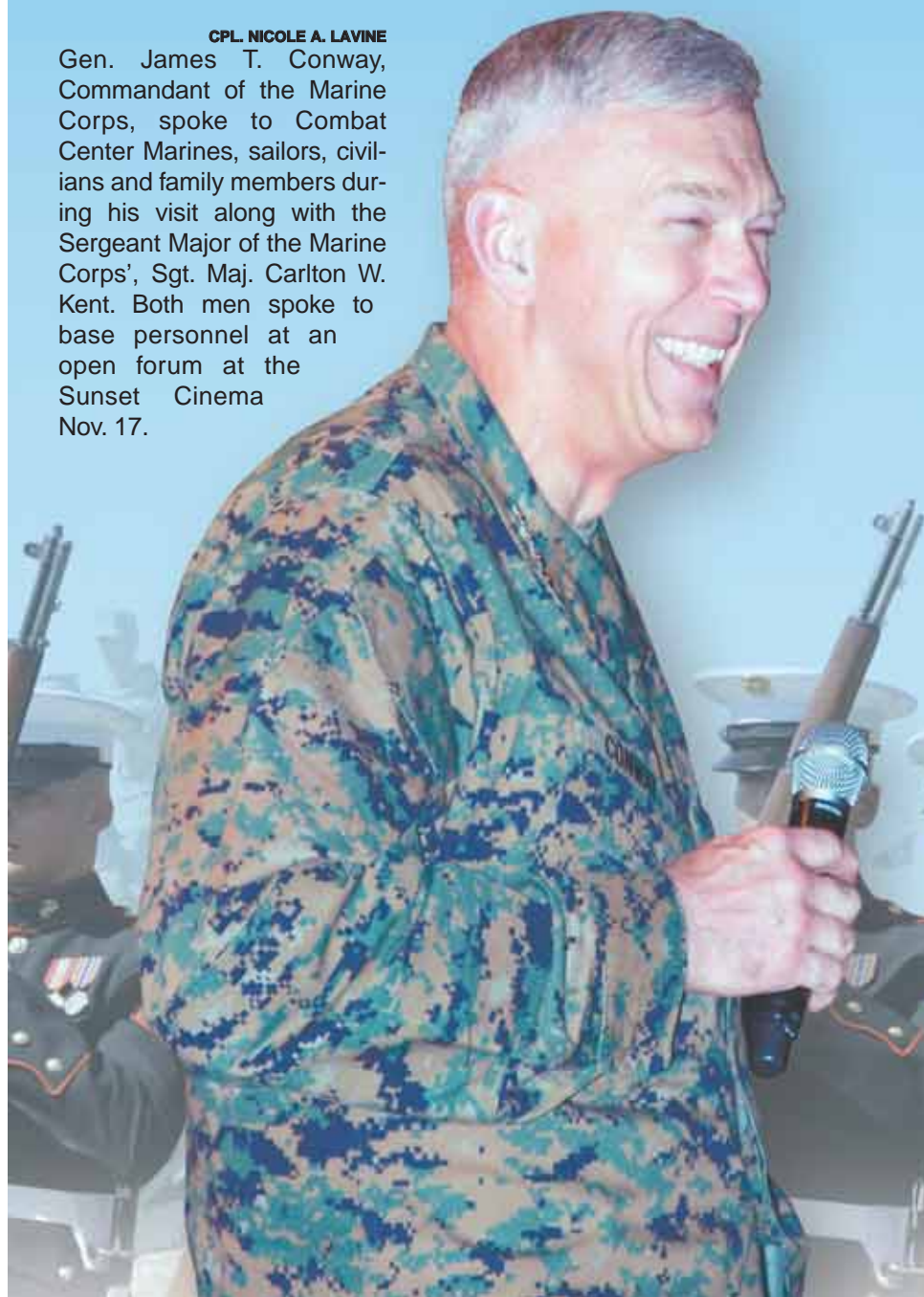
[Right] Zoe Ballerina, a Sesame Street muppet, greets and dances with children during The Sesame Street Experience for Military Families United Service Organizations tour at the Combat Center's Sunset Cinema July 8.



CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE

Adam Craighead and Jason Swift, Combat Center fire fighters, carry a mock casualty away from the scene of an improvised explosive device July 13.

CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE  
Gen. James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, spoke to Combat Center Marines, sailors, civilians and family members during his visit along with the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps', Sgt. Maj. Carlton W. Kent. Both men spoke to base personnel at an open forum at the Sunset Cinema Nov. 17.



CPL. MARGARET HUGHES

Memorials for 20 men who gave their lives during 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment's recent deployment to Afghanistan are perfectly aligned at 2/7's memorial service Dec. 12 at the Combat Center's Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field.





**LANCE CPL. ZACHARY J. NOLA**  
Pfc. Bryan J. Eccleston, a patrolman with the Combat Center's Provost Marshal's Office, observes as a California Highway Patrolman performs a sobriety test during a sobriety and driver's license checkpoint operated by the CHP and San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office at an intersection in Yucca Valley, Calif., on the night of Dec. 12.



**CPL. MARGARET HUGHES**  
An Army medic and a Marine help stabilize and comfort a mock casualty with an amputated leg in a simulated Iraqi village during a Situational Training Exercise Nov. 20 and 21 on Range 220A aboard the Combat Center.



**LANCE CPL. NICHOLAS M. DUNN**  
Lance Cpl. Etai Pickney, an aviation radar repairer with Company C, Marine Corps Communications-Electronics School, Lance Cpl. Matthew York, a rifleman with the Provost Marshal's Office, and Lance Cpl. Jonathon J. Boland, a PMO dog handler, raise the morning colors at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field Oct. 23.



**LANCE CPL. NICHOLAS M. DUNN**  
Navy Lt. David J. Dyer, a 23rd Dental Company dentist, cleans a patient's teeth during the dental field equipment test exercise behind the Adult Medical Care Clinic Nov. 20.



**LANCE CPL. NICHOLAS M. DUNN**  
Snow falls on the statue of Robert E. Bush, a corpsman who received a posthumous Medal of Honor for bravery in World War II, during an unpreseasoned snowstorm Dec. 17.



**CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE**  
Lance Cpl. Daniel H. Ealy, Company B, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, dressed as a Marine from 1812 prepares to stand at parade rest while a description of the Corps in the 1800s was narrated during the Combat Center's 2008 Marine Corps Birthday Pageant at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field Nov. 5.



**LANCE CPL. COREY A. BLODGETT**  
Mortar Marines with Company L, 3rd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, perform fire missions during a mock Taliban ambush prior to the company calling in rotary and fixed wing air strikes during an Afghanistan-centered Mojave Viper at the Combat Center Sept. 17.



**SGT. MICHAEL S. CIFUENTES**  
Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus accepts the colors during his change of command ceremony at the Combat Center's Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gary Field May 19.

# Young Marines tackle obstacles, learn way of Marines

**CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE**

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

MOUNTAIN WARFARE TRAINING CENTER BRIDGEPORT, Calif. – The Marine Corps' standards on honor, courage and commitment have drawn in

courageous men and women for centuries.

For some Marines, the inspiration to join the elite ranks of those who fought in historic battles such as Belleau Wood struck at an early age.

Sixteen of those challenge-seeking

members of the Young Marine Program joined Marines from Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center Bridgeport, Calif., for a short week of military-like activities Dec. 27 to 30.

Members of the Lance Cpl. Kenneth Lee Worley Young Marine Unit from Bellflower, Calif., participated in several military activities such as mountain land navigation, map reading, hiking, rock climbing and other pastimes, said retired 1st Sgt. Jack R. Closson, the unit's commanding officer.

Closson, who has been in charge of the unit since its establishment four years ago, said he believes the Young Marine Program helps teach young Americans solid work ethics and the value of being a productive citizen.

"This program gets and keeps the kids off the streets," said Closson, a Benton Harbor, Mich., native. "It gives any 8 to 18-year-olds who want to get challenged a chance to pursue those challenges."

Closson added the Young Marine Program is an anti-drug, anti-gang element supporting the Drug Demand Reduction Program and is sponsored by the Marine Corps League.

Dominic Rodriguezdeorey, a 17-year-old sergeant in the Young Marine Program, was the most senior member to attend the trip. He and his younger brother, Christian, said they find great satisfaction in what the program offers.

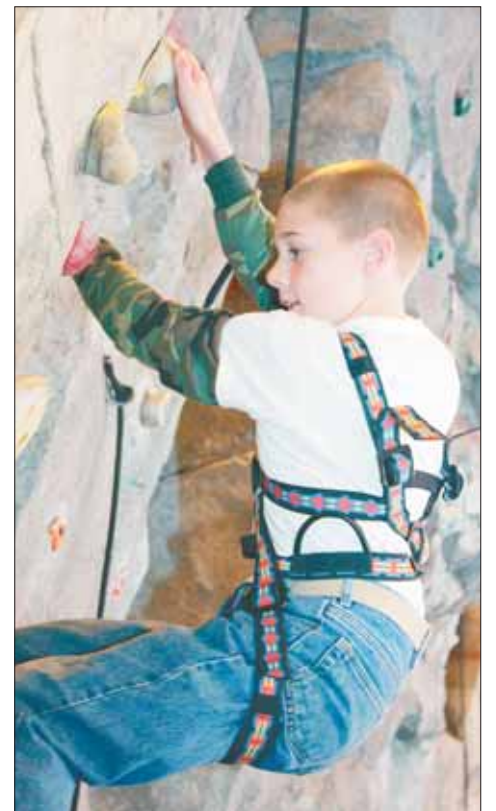
"It teaches you discipline, that's for sure," said Rodriguezdeorey, a Bellflower, Calif., native. "It has taught me a lot about motivation, about thinking more than just yourself, about integrity and how to be a better citizen in general."

Rodriguezdeorey, who has been in the program for five years, said he highly recommends peers to find out for themselves what the program can do for them.

"It has changed a lot of people I know," he said. "It keeps you busy during the weekends and gives you a lot of people to relate to who will have your back."

Christian, 16, has been in the program for four years and said his brother's stories about the opportunities in the program inspired him to join as well.

"My brother told me details about being in the program, gaining rank, earn-



CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE

Martin Erdman, a Young Marine with the Lance Cpl. Kenneth Lee Worley Young Marine Unit out of Bellflower, Calif., makes his way up an artificial rock wall at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center fitness center Dec. 29.

ing respect and about all the activities they do," he said. "I've noticed a change in myself since I joined. I'm doing better in school, I do what I'm told and I stay out of trouble."

After the Young Marines discovered the secrets and challenges of rock wall climbing at the MWTC fitness center Dec. 29, they made their way to their sleeping quarters near the MWTC Expeditionary Air Field, conducted a military-style clean-up and had dinner.

They arose early the next morning for a hearty breakfast before their long drive back to Bellflower.

The Young Marine Program has worked to strengthen the characters and discipline of young Americans across the nation since 1959, according to the Young Marines Web site <http://www.youngmarines.com>.

For more information or to find out how to support one of the 34 California Young Marine units, visit the Web site.



CPL. NICOLE A. LAVINE

Sgt. Harold E. Linsley, a Mountain Leaders Course instructor at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center Bridgeport, Calif., and another MWTC Marine demonstrate the proper technique for hooking up the climbing harness to the Young Marines from the Lance Cpl. Kenneth Lee Worley Young Marine Unit out of Bellflower, Calif., before the Young Marines climb the rock wall at the MWTC fitness center Dec. 29.

## Employees of the month

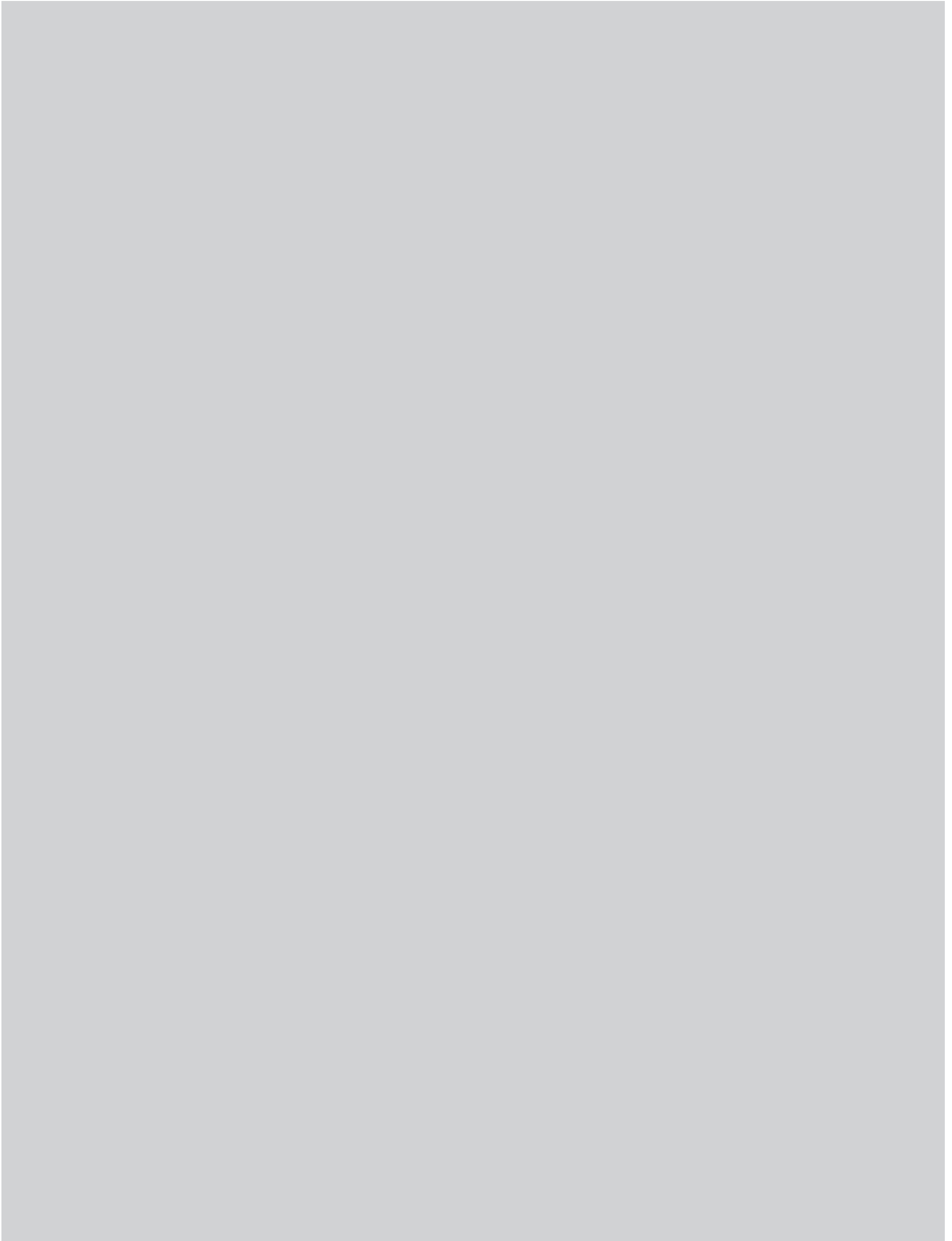


CPL. MARGARET HUGHES

Brig. Gen. Charles M. Gurganus, the Combat Center's commanding general, and Sgt. Maj. Susan Bellis, the Combat Center's sergeant major, recognize civilian employees during the Combat Center's morning colors ceremony Jan. 7 at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field. The employees were recognized with a Letter of Appreciation or Certificate of Commendation for various contributions to the base. The ceremony is a monthly event to acknowledge service members and civilian employees that take initiative, and go above and beyond their daily tasks.

**SOLUTIONS**

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# Toys for Tots brings big smiles to children's faces

**CPL. MARGARET HUGHES**

COMBAT CORRESPONDENT

The High and Low-Desert regional U.S. Marine Corps Reserve Toys for Tots Program surpassed last year's collection and distribution by more than 3,000 toys with a total of 35,529, allowing more families to provide a Christmas to their children when they did not have the means to.

According to the Toys for Tots Program Web site, the primary goal is to deliver, through a shiny new toy at Christmas, a message of hope to needy youngsters that will motivate them to grow into responsible, productive, patriotic

citizens and community leaders.

"I have had families come up and say how grateful they are," said Maj. Brian Manifor, the Toys for Tots regional coordinator. "They have no electricity, can't afford a Christmas dinner or even a Christmas tree. The only way they would have a Christmas at all is with the toys they receive from Toys for Tots."

The local program distributed toys to 183 families and 422 children on base, 390 families and 1,062 children in Twentynine Palms, 477 families and 1,241 children in Yucca Valley, and the remaining toys were donated to the Salvation Army in the Low-Desert to be distributed amongst

50 charities to go to families that can not provide their children with a toy for the holidays.

"Some families had tears in their eyes because their children were going to have a Christmas," said Lance Cpl. Jon Perez, a regional program representative.

The U.S. Marine Corps Reserve substantially cut the Toys for Tots budget, so the regional program had to rely more heavily on Marines and volunteers to help as many families as possible this season, Manifor said.

Before Christmas, nationwide, Toys for Tots collected 30 percent less than the previous year, the High and Low-Desert program was able to collect more toys even with a fund cut, Manifor said.

The Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital supplied a large number of volunteers to man the hotlines; the Marine Corps Communications-Electronics School provided hundreds of man hours with working parties, the Officers' Spouse Club provided many hours of volunteer work and the regional Toys for Tots Marines spent countless hours to put a smile on as many children's faces as possible.

"I'm proud of my Marines," Manifor said. "They did an astonishing job with fewer assets. The Marines worked most weekends during the holiday season, spent countless hours in dress blues, on the road collecting toys and in the warehouse sorting toys."



CPL. MARGARET HUGHES

MCCES Marines stand in formation while holding their toys to donate before the 13th annual MCCES Toys for Tots Run aboard the Combat Center Dec. 5.

## CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

### Sunday

#### Roman Catholic Services Immaculate Heart of Mary Chapel

Faith Formation/CCD-8 a.m.  
Confessions+ - 8:45 a.m.  
Rosary - 9 a.m.  
Catholic Mass\* - 9:30 a.m.  
Children's Liturgy of the Word 9:30 a.m.  
Confessions+ - 4:15 p.m.  
Choir Practice - 4 p.m.  
Rosary - 4:30 p.m.  
Catholic Mass - 5 p.m.

#### Protestant Services Christ Chapel

Lay-Led Independent Baptist Breakfast, West Wing - 8:30 a.m.  
Non-Denominational Service Worship - 9 a.m.  
Children's Church - 9 a.m.  
Sunday School - 10:15 a.m.  
Youth Group 6 p.m.

#### Pastor-Led Lutheran Worship Worship-NHTP Chapel-11:15 a.m.

#### Lay-Led Gospel Service Worship - 11:30 a.m.

#### Weekday Events

#### Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Mass Mon-Fri - 11:45 a.m. (except holidays)

#### Monday

#### Christ Chapel

Praise & Worship Rehearsal-4 p.m.

#### Immaculate Heart of Mary

Catholic Mass, Mon-Fri - 11:45 a.m. (except holidays)

#### Tuesday

#### Christ Chapel

Christian Women's Fellowship\* - 9 a.m., (September - May)

#### Immaculate Heart of Mary

Children's RCIA - 4-5:30 p.m.  
Catechist Meeting - 5-8 p.m. (Second Tuesday each month)  
Baptism Class - 6-7:30 p.m. (First Tuesday each month)

#### C&E Barracks Building 1666

Bible Study - 6:30 p.m. Chaplain Hester 830-6187

#### Wednesday

#### Christ Chapel

Praise Band Rehearsal - 6 p.m.  
Food/Fellowship - 6:30 p.m.  
Non-Denomination Bible Study- 7 p.m.

Lay-Led Gospel Bible Study-7 p.m.

#### Immaculate Heart of Mary

Military Council of Catholic Women\* - 9:30 a.m. Sept. - May  
Youth Teen - 6 p.m.  
Knights of Columbus - 7 p.m. (1st Wednesday each month)

#### Thursday

#### "Faith Lessons" Bible Study

Building 1651, at 12 p.m. with Chaplains Moran and Hester. For more info call 830-6187

#### Immaculate Heart of Mary

RCIA-6-7:30 p.m.  
Resumes Sept. 11

#### Friday

#### Christ Chapel

Gospel Rehearsal - 5 p.m.

#### Immaculate Heart of Mary

Exposition/Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament 12:15-4:30 p.m. (First Friday each month)

\* Indicates Child Care Provided  
+Appointments can be made for Confessions by calling 830-6456/6482

Even with all the volunteer work, the program relies on the generosity of the local community, Manifor said. Marine Corps Community Services customers donated 12,000 Santa Silver dollars to allow volunteers to pur-

chase and donate more toys.

With a positive end result for this holiday season, the trend is expected to be continued in the years to follow.

"We are spreading a message of hope," said Manifor.

# 'Scars are not forever'

**STAFF SGT. ETHAN E. ROCKE**  
HEADQUARTERS MARINE CORPS

LOS ANGELES — It was an ideal. A mantra. One of those romantic assertions that grabs the heart and muses in the soul the question: What if? "Scars are not forever" was conceived for one Marine in the months of rehabilitation that followed an IED blast in Iraq, which left him badly burned and disfigured. Since then, the spirit of that ideal has evolved into an innovative partnership between military and civilian medicine that is actualizing, for some, that once rhetorical question: What if?

Aaron Mankin lay still on an operating table, bright halogen bulbs spilling light over every bit of his fire-scarred face: closed eyes placid with unconsciousness, relaxed jaw peeking out from the fissure between rich, disfigured lip tissue, an incision on the right side of his nose stretching the length of it.

The ordered bustle of the operating room lay outside, far above the anesthesia.

There, Dr. Timothy Miller, chief of reconstructive and plastic surgery at the University of California, Los Angeles Medical Center, looks down at Mankin's face and focuses.

Coolly marking Mankin's face with a pen earlier, Miller had

described the goals of the procedure, Mankin acknowledging with a characteristic smile and nod — a gesture of enduring trust in the man whose scalpel has been to Mankin's face what da Vinci's brush was to his Mona Lisa.

"I take your pictures home with me, ya' know?" Miller said during the examination, referring to the dozens of photos he uses to track and plot the evolution of Mankin's face before and after operating on it a dozen times.

Mankin reached to his throat to close the airway of his tracheostomy and push the air from his lungs up through his damaged vocal chords.

"Oh yeah?" he said, his soft, raspy voice contrasting smiling, wide eyes.

"Oh yeah," Miller said, looking to Mankin's mother, Diana Phelps, and nodding with a smile. "I do, really."

This is Mankin's twelfth surgery under Miller's hands — "magic hands," say some of his coworkers and patients. The lofty, soothing melody of Frank Sinatra's "Fly Me to the Moon" wafts in the operating room as Miller makes a precise and gentle sawing motion with his tiny scalpel, a handful of doctors and nurses looking on. He trims away unnecessary flesh from beneath Mankin's nose — the nose he built with cranial bone and skin from



STAFF SGT. ETHAN E. ROCKE

A skin graft taken from Aaron Mankin's chest is placed over the exposed tissue left on the left side of his nose after doctors performed a surgery to thin out his nose Nov. 18 at UCLA Medical Center. Mankin has had more than 50 surgeries since he was wounded May 11, 2005. Twelve of them have been at UCLA Medical Center through Operation Mend, a partnership between the U.S. military and UCLA Medical Center, through which UCLA provides world-class plastic reconstructive surgeries to disfigured service members.

Mankin's forehead.

That was the first step. Now Miller needs to thin it out, make it better resemble Mankin's old nose, the one he had before an explosion in Iraq left him badly burned about his arms and face — the nose from the pictures of the handsome, slender Arkansas boy with that coy twinkle of charisma. Miller takes to the task with the enthusiasm of an inspired artist.

"(These service members) have given a tremendous amount of their lives to me and my family," Miller says. "If I can give something back to them, it's very gratifying."

The thin, boyish features Mankin inherited were supplanted May 11, 2005. Then Lance Cpl. Mankin was a Marine combat correspondent assigned to cover Operation Matador, a roughly weeklong mission to root out insurgents near the Syrian border north of the Euphrates River. Mankin was riding in an amphibious assault vehicle when a massive explosion from a roadside bomb rocked the 26-ton vehicle.

The violent blast threw Mankin down inside the vehicle. When the instant haze of chaos and concussion cleared, Mankin opened his eyes. He was on fire.

"The instinctive reaction at that point is to just gasp," recalls

the 26-year-old father of two. "That's how I sustained most of my trachea injuries. I saw light at the back of the vehicle and just dove toward this dry, crusted earth. I rolled trying to get the fire out but couldn't do it. I was exhausted, and I just closed my eyes and was ready to die. That's when I heard the shouts of my fellow Marines saying 'Put him out! Put him out!'"

The incident left Mankin with 25 percent of his body burned. His genetic predisposition to generate unusually high amounts of scar tissue caused his facial features to gradually contort, eventually twisting and fusing his nose and mouth area so much that his mouth shrank to a tiny, taut opening about an inch below an asymmetrical half-nose that, without its natural tip, displayed irregularly large nostrils and an upturned look.

"Initially, Aaron's face looked normal," says his mother. "There were no visible wounds. And then it began to draw in and tighten up. I had to use a small funnel to feed him."

Phelps helped care for her son for the first eight months he was a patient at Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where all of the U.S. military's burn victims go for treatment. "BAM-C," to which it is

often affectionately referred, is one of the nation's premiere trauma centers for burn victims, both military and civilian.

The hospital has cared for more than 4,043 service members wounded in the War on Terror, and the Army Burn Center there has treated 731 of those, according to hospital officials.

Mankin underwent about 40 surgeries at BAMC, including myriad skin grafts and an operation to open his mouth back up so he could eat normally.

But, according to Phelps, the limits of the medical center's capabilities became apparent when the care required became a matter of aesthetics rather than physical rehabilitation.

"The doctors at Brooke are fantastic, but their focus is on function, not aesthetics," she says.

President Bush has expanded the Defense Department's health-care funding by more than 200 percent since 2001, and the military has made many advances in military medicine and healthcare infrastructure since the War on Terror began. But until recently, the military could not provide extensive reconstructive surgeries to its members.

General James F. Amos, assistant



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Dr. Timothy Miller, chief of reconstructive and plastic surgery at the University of California Los Angeles Medical Center, discusses the possibility of a future surgery to increase the flexibility in Mankin's arm during an examination Nov. 24 at UCLA Medical Center. Mankin was the first wounded service member to take advantage of Operation Mend, a partnership between the U.S. military and UCLA Medical Center, through which UCLA provides world-class plastic reconstructive surgeries to disfigured service members.

**See SCARS, A14**

## SCARS, from A13

commandant of the Marine Corps, is among senior leadership at the Pentagon that has been at the forefront of the military's recent efforts to address the shortfall.

"We've made great gains in recent years in expanding our continuity of care for wounded warriors, but change comes slow," Amos says.

But in October 2007, the military's slow, steady trend in health-care advancement got sent into overdrive in the field of reconstructive surgery. The catalyst was an injection into the system from outside the government.

The prospect was revolutionary: One of the nation's top hospitals offering up the services of its world-class, plastic reconstructive surgeons – no charge. It was exactly what the military needed to quickly bridge the gap between function and aesthetics for its disfigured warriors.

The man carrying the torch to the military was philanthropist Ronald A. Katz, a successful inventor and UCLA Medical Center board member.

"The concept was simple," Katz says. "Why couldn't we provide to these wounded service members not only the best medical care the military had to offer but the best the country could offer?"

Military leadership at BAMC and the Pentagon agreed, and a partnership was forged between the military and UCLA Medical Center, which U.S. News & World Report ranks as one of the top three hospitals in the nation and the top hospital in the western U.S. The partnership has since become known as Operation Mend.

In October 2007, Mankin became Operation Mend's first patient. He was also, in large part, the inspiration for the program, according to Katz.

Katz and his wife, Madelyn, became involved with BAMC in 2006 when fundraiser and avid proponent of military and veterans' causes Bill White invited the Katzes to San Antonio. Katz donated the lead gift at that time to a privately-funded project that brought to Fort Sam Houston in January 2007 two new Fisher Houses, which house families of wounded service members receiving treatment at BAMC.

"My wife and I visited the burn ward at Brooke, and we were particularly distressed by the number of facially disfigured service members," Katz says.

A pivotal moment in Operation Mend's conception occurred when Katz and his wife watched Mankin, whose charismatic personality and affinity for public speaking has attracted media attention and thrust Mankin into the limelight, on CNN in an interview with Lou Dobbs in November 2006.

"Lou asked Aaron, 'What's next for you?'" says Katz. "And Aaron said, 'They've gotta' fix the beautiful part ... get me back to good looking.' That really struck us."

Katz says Mankin's image and words that day were the beginning, but a final call to action

came when the Katzes attended in January 2007 the opening ceremony for the Center for the Intrepid, a state-of-the-art physical rehabilitation center for amputees and burn victims adjacent to BAMC, and the new Fisher Houses, which Katz's donations helped build. There were many disfigured service members at the ceremony.

"Seeing Aaron planted the seed, but seeing how many Aarons there are was the key," Katz says. "At that point, we decided we should connect military commanders and my connections at UCLA."

Katz says it took about six months to marry up the bureaucracies of BAMC and UCLA, and as the details of the partnership were worked out, Katz's resolve and passion for the program became infectious within UCLA's medical community.

"Once the program was announced, the byproduct was a wellspring of enthusiasm from people within the hospital to do something extraordinary for these service members," he says. "The program is really two parts: medical care and personal care."

Katz donated the first \$1 million to fund Operation Mend and helped raise more than \$10 million more. The private funds cover the costs of the surgeries as well as travel expenses for patients and their families, lodging, a living allowance and any extra medical expenses. The military's health insurance provider, Tricare, covers the cost of hospitalization for patients.

"Although it's expensive at our end, it's a blessing to be able to use these funds to make such a difference in the lives of these soldiers and Marines," Katz says.

Volunteers within UCLA's medical community also provide patients with what Katz calls "buddy families." Katz's son Todd, his wife Dana and their children are the premier buddy family, providing friendship and support to Mankin, his wife Diana and their children during Mankin's 12 trips to UCLA. Dana also oversees and coordinates the buddy family program.

"Everyone is compelled by the cause," Dana says. "The CEO of UCLA Medical Center, called us and said, 'Can we be a buddy family?' When the CEO wants to be a buddy family, that's not your typical bureaucracy."

UCLA nurse Priscilla "Patti" Taylor, a retired Army nurse, also leads a community group of military veterans who sew "quilts of valor" for incoming patients.

Army Vice Chief of Staff Gen. Peter W. Chiarelli and Gen. Amos, the Corps' second in command, have both visited Katz and other UCLA officials in recent months to talk about expanding Operation Mend.

"Programs like Operation Mend have shown us that sometimes the private sector can inject a capability into the system that we don't have," Amos says.

Katz says it is his hope that Operation Mend will expand beyond plastic reconstructive surgery.

"Fortunately, UCLA has extraordinary talents in many areas," he says. "Our hope is that



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Dr. Timothy Miller, chief of reconstructive surgery at the University of California, Los Angeles Medical Center, operates on Aaron Mankin's face Nov. 18 at UCLA Medical Center. Miller has operated on Mankin 12 times, and Mankin was the first wounded service member to take advantage of Operation Mend, a partnership the U.S. military and UCLA Medical Center, through which UCLA provides world-class plastic reconstructive surgeries to disfigured service members.

we will involve ourselves with other DoD hospitals that care for patients other than burn victims. If they need certain expertise that we can provide, we think UCLA has a lot to offer."

In the meantime, Katz says Operation Mend currently has the funding and resources to continue providing reconstructive surgeries to any service members who need them, and he hopes to see other hospitals follow UCLA's lead.

"We're not the only place in the world that has extraordinary capabilities and talents," he says. "I think in the next year or so, there is a possibility that this could expand to other medical centers of excellence, and if they need guidance, we can transport that to them."

Amos says if other hospitals in the private sector are willing to further expand the care the mili-

tary can provide, "We are more than ready to embrace that willingness and build a partnership."

"The Marine Corps and the DoD are fully committed to providing world-class care to our wounded warriors, but there is always room for improvement, and there may, in certain areas, be limitations to what military medicine can provide."

Operation Mend has provided 43 surgeries to seven soldiers and Marines since October 2007, and 10 more patients are currently scheduled to undergo surgery in 2009, according to UCLA officials.

Mankin and his mother tried to express what those numbers mean to the people whose lives they affect.

"Early on in my recovery I adopted the notion that 'scars are not forever' as a mindset," Mankin says. "It was an articula-

tion of my acceptance that this is the way I'm going to look for the rest of my life, and, with that, I'm not going to let my physical appearance keep me from being who I am and reaching the goals I set for myself.

"That mindset evolved when individuals from the other side of the nation opened up their hearts and their homes and said to me, 'This is a reality we can give to you.' And for them to seek me out and ask, 'Can we do this for you?' is an overwhelming blessing and I think speaks to the true spirit of the American people."

Choking up, Phelps echoed her son's sentiment, "There's not a deep enough place inside me that could explain the gratitude for what they've given and what they've done and what they're doing, not just for Aaron, but for everyone. There's not a deep enough place."



STAFF SGT. ETHAN E. ROCKE

Octavio Sanchez and Aaron Mankin, both wounded Marines who were given new noses by UCLA's world-class plastic reconstructive surgeons, take a moment to catch up at UCLA Medical Center Nov. 24. Mankin and Sanchez are both medically retired Marines who have had multiple surgeries through Operation Mend.

## Combat Center Trader Ads

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### MISC.

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Web site at: <http://www.29palms.usmc.mil/dirs/pao/> and complete a request to publish an ad.

The limitations for ads are: 15-word limit, limit of two ads per household and the Trader may be used only for

**ALL WEATHER COAT 38R,** \$10. Four S/S Creighton shirts, L 16-16, \$10 each. Call 401-5988. 12-12-08

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**CRAFT SHOW** at Sage-wood Manor Apartments. 6215 Ocotillo Ave. off Adobe Rd. Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Great Prices. 12/5/08

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**FOR SALE KENMORE WASHER AND DRYER** great condition, \$200. Free color TV. Call Chris at 362-5293. 11/21/08

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The deadline for submitting Trader ads is noon Wednesday, for the upcoming Friday's paper.

Trader Ad Forms are available at the Public Affairs Office and may be filled out during normal working hours at Bldg. 1417.

Ads may also be submitted through e-mail, but will only be accepted from those with an @usmc.mil address. If you are active duty, retired military or a family member and do not have an @usmc.mil address you can go to the PAO page of the base



## Birth announcements



**ATTICUS MICHAEL SIMS**  
Son of Lance Cpl. Michael Sims and wife, Bianca Sims.

Born Dec. 7, weighing 7 pounds, 13 ounces and measuring 20.2 inches.

**EMMA GRACE ABIGAIL ANDERSON**

Daughter of Staff Sgt. Eric Anderson and wife, Chelsea Anderson.

Born Dec. 8, weighing 7 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 19.7 inches.

**PELAYIAH ANJELI WITMER**

Daughter of Alan Witmer and wife, Tussannee Witmer.

Born Dec. 5, weighing 6 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 19.3 inches.

**NOAH JAMES EVERETT**

Son of Lance Cpl. Stephen Everett and wife, Delisa Everett.

Born Dec. 4, weighing 7 pounds, 5 ounces and measuring 20.1 inches.

**ABBAGAYL ROSE BROWN**

Daughter of Capt. Daymian Brown and wife, Jacquelyn Brown.

Born Dec. 5, weighing 6 pounds, 5 ounces and measuring 19 inches.

**MICHELLE AURRY MCNICOLL**

Daughter of 1st Lt. Michael McNicoll and wife, Erica McNicoll.

Born Dec. 4, weighing 6 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 19.2 inches.

**BODIE JAYMES HARRIS**

Son of Sgt. Jason Harris and wife, Katy Harris.

Born Dec. 4, weighing 8 pounds, 7 ounces and measuring 20.6 inches.

**ZAIDA AMELIA LISNEROS**

Daughter of Cpl. Ramon Lisneros and wife, Zahira Lisneros.

Born Dec. 3, weighing 6 pounds, 12 ounces and measuring 20 inches.

**MAKENZIE WEAVER**

Daughter of Cpl. Bobby Weaver and wife, Sarrah Weaver.

Born Dec. 2, weighing 8 pounds, 10 ounces and measuring 20.7 inches.

**SERGIO ROBERT ANTUNEZ**

Son of 1st Lt. Sergio Sandoval and Jaqueline Antunez.

Born Nov. 30, weighing 8 pounds, 7 ounces and measuring 20.3 inches.

**EMBER MARIE-LYNN JONES**

Daughter of Lance Cpl. Mitchell Jones and wife, Nicole Jones.

Born Dec. 1, weighing 6 pounds, 4 ounces and measuring 18.3 inches.

**ADRIEL RUSSELL OKATI MOSS**

Son of Lance Cpl. Russell Moss and wife, Malia Moss.

Born Nov. 30, weighing 6 pounds and measuring 19 inches.

**MYLIE DENISE DENSON**

Daughter of Staff Sgt. David Denson and wife, Angela Denson.

Born Nov. 30, weighing 6 pounds, 3 ounces and measuring 18.1 inches.

**EMERY ARCHER DELROSARIO**

Son of Sgt. Brian Delrosario and wife, Renee Delrosario.

Born Nov. 29, weighing 7 pounds, 1 ounce and measuring 19 inches.

**ISABELA MARIE SPINOZZI**

Daughter of Seaman Shea Spinozzi and wife, Luz Spinozzi.

Born Dec. 7, weighing 6 pounds, 4 ounces and measuring 19.3 inches.

**JAMAIYA RENEE JONES**

Daughter of Petty Officer 3rd Class Robert Jones and wife, Tony Jones.

Born Nov. 29, weighing 7 pounds, 10 ounces and measuring 21 inches.

**LEILA MARIE MENDOZA**

Daughter of Lance Cpl. Jimmie Mendoza and wife, Estela Mendoza

Born Nov. 27, weighing 7 pounds, 4 ounces and measuring 20.3 inches.

**MIKAELA MARIE MOORE**

Daughter of Cpl. Andrew Moore and wife, Elizabeth Moore.

Born Nov. 26, weighing 8 pounds, 4 ounces and measuring 20.3 inches.

**ADAM PITTMAN JR.**

Son of Pvt. Adam Pittman and Wife, Genavea Pittman.

Born Nov. 24, weighing 5 pounds, 11 ounces and measuring 18 inches.

**LOGAN CHRISTIAN JORDAN**

Son of Cpl. Joshua Jordan and wife, Linda Jordan.

Born Nov. 22, weighing 9 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 21.6 inches.

**MARIA ROSE FRELK**

Daughter of Cpl. Michael Frelk and wife, Katherine Frelk.

Born Nov. 20, weighing 6 pounds, 8 ounces and measuring 19 inches.

**KIRA SOPHIA GOMEZ**

Daughter of Pfc. Kevin Gomez and wife, Martha Gomez.

Born Nov. 17, weighing 7 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 20.6 inches.

**LAUREN ELIZABETH HILLIS**

Daughter of Staff Sgt. Eric Hillis and wife, Melissa Hillis.

Born Nov. 15, weighing 7 pounds, 11 ounces and measuring 20.6 inches.

**MAXIMUS JAMES MCNAIR**

Son of Lance Cpl. James McNair and wife, Tammra McNair.

Born Nov. 14, weighing 7 pounds, 13 ounces and measuring 21 inches.

**MAKENZIE RENEE CABLE**

Daughter of Lance Cpl. Joshua Cable and wife, Brittany Cable.

Born Nov. 15, weighing 6 pounds, 14 ounces and measuring 19.7 inches.

**ELIZABETH ANNE MOREAU**

Daughter of Sgt. Gordon Moreau and wife Angela Moreau.

Born Nov. 15, weighing 8 pounds, 2 ounces and measuring 20.7 inches.

**GREGORY JAMES RADEL**

Son of Lance Cpl. Robert Radel and wife, Amanda Radel.

Born Nov. 26, weighing 7 pounds, 10 ounces and measuring 19.2 inches.

