

**EXPANDED  
HOLIDAY ISSUE:**

VETERAN'S DAY 5K RACE  
CHRISTMAS IN IRAQ  
GREAT PIZZA, GREAT CAUSE

CHRISTMAS IN AFGHANISTAN  
ADOPT A UNIT  
SUCCESS STORIES

## KRISTEN'S CORNER

Hello OTA Volunteers, Supporters and Friends!

Happy New Year! As we catch our breath from 2006, I'd like to reflect on our busiest, most successful and fulfilling year since we began in 2004. During 2006, we met the "wish list" needs of more than 11,000 deployed troops throughout the Middle East, providing items such as moisture-wicking and thermal Under Armour brand clothing, tactical supplies, and MWR (morale, welfare and recreation) equipment.



President George W. Bush honored OTA on March 22, 2006 when he presented me the Volunteer Service Award to recognize OTA's efforts in support of our troops. VP Monica Orluk and I had the pleasure of meeting the President

and we will never forget the honor bestowed on OTA.

The journey of 1,000 miles begins with the first step, and no one knows this better than Adam Goodrich and Chris Tapp. The pair embarked on a 3,000 mile cross-country journey in June to promote OTA and meet soldiers along the way who benefited from OTA



while deployed. The trek from Seattle to Clearwater, Florida, took the pair four months to complete, and gained national media attention for OTA.



Volunteers outdid themselves putting on many events throughout the year. Our most memorable and bittersweet event was the LTC Michael McLaughlin

Memorial Golf Outing in May. LTC McLaughlin died in combat protecting his soldiers in Ramadi on January 5, 2006. We were humbled to honor this brave soldier, bringing together his friends and family to pay tribute to this great man and his legacy.

As we reflect on the success and good memories of 2006, we are inspired to make sure our troops never fall asleep at night wondering if anyone at home remembers or cares that they are over there. Our volunteers are dedicated to our military men and women, and we are grateful for all the time and passion they shower on OTA. For those who have supported OTA's efforts financially, logistically and emotionally, we thank you on behalf of the thousands of lives on whom you have made an impact.

Here's to 2007! We look forward to making an even bigger difference this year.

Sincerely,

Kristen Holloway, President

## MARINES IN IRAQ BENEFIT FROM VETERAN'S DAY 5K RACE



**And they're off!**

Two hundred runners gathered on an unseasonably warm November morning, with various reasons to run the 5K race in Hampton Township. Some came to achieve personal goals, win prizes, or enjoy the camaraderie. But there was one purpose that united everyone: every participant, volunteer and spectator came to support our troops.

The Marine Corps Color Guard began the festivities and led the children's choir in a moving rendition of the National Anthem. The St. Mary's Children's Choir, singers from Hampton High School, and the Christ Divine Teacher Catholic Academy Forensics Team provided entertainment and patriotic background music that brightened the day.

USMC Sgt. Anthony Gower, an Iraq War veteran and Purple Heart recipient, shared some impromptu and heartfelt thoughts, capturing the attention of runners and volunteers as he expressed his gratitude to the group for their efforts, and for remembering his brothers-in-arms still in Iraq. His simple comments were especially poignant and stirred the emotions of all because of their spontaneity.

Thanks to the participants, donors of prizes and food, and to the generous sponsors, OTA raised enough to purchase phone cards for 1,000 Marines in Iraq, enabling the whole battalion to call home for Christmas! Thank you to our sponsors, including:

- All American Beverage Co.
- Braund Eiler & Vasco, C.P.A.
- Buchanan Ingersoll & Rooney P.C.
- Dr. Jane Soxman, D.D.S.
- First Commonwealth Bank
- Lincoln Property Corp.

We also extend our deepest gratitude to event coordinator Alice McLaughlin and her dedicated volunteer committee, who executed a perfect event that far exceeded even their own expectations. God bless them for their passion, energy, and dedication!

## LADIES AUXILIARY HELPS OTA



This fall, the Ladies Auxiliary Library VFW Post 6664 embarked on a mission to help OTA fulfill soldiers' "wish lists." Chairwoman Kathie Gasior and Assistant Chairladies Janet Smith and Nanci Kreigline went to work immediately to help complete over 2,100 "wish lists" for Christmas. It did not take long for the Ladies Auxiliary to collect more than \$4,500 and dozens of boxes of needed items – far surpassing their goal and ensuring those 2,100 wishes (and many more) were fulfilled! We would like to thank all the members of the Auxiliary, and especially Kathie Gasior, who spent countless hours on this very successful project.

We also extend a special Thank You to the individuals, businesses and organizations in the South Park Community and surrounding areas who contributed to the success of this endeavor. We commend them for their community spirit, generosity and support of our troops.

- Brentwood Bank
- Curves, Bavarian Village
- Falconbridge U. S., Inc
- Iron and Glass Bank
- Macy's W. Mifflin Employees
- Mrs. Janet Smith
- Mrs. Mary Ellen Pattison
- Ms. Nanci Kreigline
- Pittsburgh South Hills Elks
- Prescription Center Plus
- South Park Elementary School, 1st Grade
- South Park Municipal Complex
- St. Clair Hospital Volunteer Services
- St. Joan of Arc Church and School
- VFW Post 6664



**The St. Mary's Children's Choir sang patriotic hymns along the race route.**



**Race Coordinator Alice McLaughlin looks on as USMC Sgt. Anthony Gower thanks the crowd for their support.**



**USMC Lt. Shawn Joyce gives a Marine a phone card from OTA, purchased from race proceeds.**

## CHRISTMAS IN IRAQ

YN2 Tiffini Wilson of the U.S. Navy contacted OTA in October with a "wish list" for her company of sailors deployed to Iraq from Williamsburg, VA. This unit performs customs, patrol and inspection missions, and YN2 Wilson wanted to make the holidays brighter, not only for the 83 sailors in her unit, but for the 100+ soldiers who share their base.

OTA sent several boxes of Christmas decorations, snacks, personal supplies, phone cards and other gifts to distribute at the base Christmas party. YN2 Wilson says in her own words the effect OTA had on their Christmas celebration:

*"The party was really great...everyone enjoyed it and they are still talking about it. As you can see from the pictures, your decorations and gifts helped make the party a success! We had gifts under the tree and a raffle. The people whose number we called got to go under the tree and pick a gift. They were so excited when their number got called, like they won the lottery. It was funny!!!"*



**Santa even paid a visit!**

*You have no idea how happy you made everyone, not just the men and women in our unit, but the different units on the base. We had over 200 people attend!!! Everyone came out to enjoy the party and loved the decorations and they are still talking about how pretty and nice everything was. You guys provided all kinds of treats and snacks and the DVDs, CDs, socks, and calling cards were a HUGE hit!!!*



**The troops celebrated the holidays, complete with Christmas tree, presents, and Santa.**

*So many people were so moved and touched by all the Christmas spirit and when we told them that the gifts were donated by you guys they couldn't believe that such generosity could come from total strangers.*



**The sailors did a great job trimming the tree with the decorations and gifts OTA sent.**

*walking by the movie tent and saw us inviting everyone in and he came in. He said he had been over here for 9 months and that was the most fun he had had in 9 months. He enjoyed taking pictures in front of the decorated tree and with Santa and he emailed them to his kids. They were excited and happy because Daddy was having fun with Santa and had decorations for Christmas. Decorating the house and front and backyard with holiday decorations is a real big tradition in his family and everyone was worried that he wouldn't have any decorations in his life this year.*

*Thanks to you, OTA, you made that happen for a lot of people. The decorations and gifts just made everyone so happy and filled with Joy....THANK YOU SO MUCH!!!"*



**OTA sent Under Armour to this unit of Light Attack Helicopter Marines.**



**This Air Force unit received their "wish list" of snacks and hygiene items from OTA.**



**These soldiers show off the Under Armour OTA sent them.**

## GREAT PIZZA FOR A GREAT CAUSE

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In the spirit of holiday giving, OTA partnered with The Hope Lives Foundation for a very special event. Jim Toner, Founder and Executive Director of the foundation, through the generosity of the owners of the Luciano's and Lucci's Pizza restaurants, put on an outstanding event to raise funds for the community. In addition to helping 200 families in need through the Salvation Army of McKeesport, funds were also raised to help grant wishes for OTA's soldiers.

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, the owners and employees of Luciano's Restaurants in Bethel Park and the North Hills, and Lucci's Pizza in Squirrel Hill and Harrison City, donated all sales to The Hope Lives Foundation. The employees also volunteered their time and worked for tips that day – which they in turn donated to the fund! OTA Vice President Monica Orluk joined members of The Hope Lives Foundation and visited the pizza shops.


We are grateful to Jim Toner and Kathy Svilar of Hope Lives, and the owners and employees of Lucci's and Luciano's for their extreme generosity and dedication of time and talent for this wonderful outreach project.



**OTA VP Monica Orluk worked the day with Danny Pasquarelli (owner of Lucci's and Luciano's, and father of a US Marine) and the kind folks of Hope Lives: Vince Parucci, Santa's helper Todd Lash, Bob Lee, and Jim Toner.**

## SEARCH THE WEB AND SUPPORT THE TROOPS

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 Think about how many times a day you use an internet search engine. Now, imagine that every time you searched, money was given to the charity of your choice. You don't have to imagine any longer, as Good Search now allows you to raise money for Operation Troop Appreciation every time you conduct a search!

All you need to do is use [GoodSearch.com](http://GoodSearch.com) to search the Internet. The first time you use the search engine, type Operation Troop Appreciation in the second box, click "Verify," and search as you normally would. It's that easy, and funds will automatically be directed to OTA every time you perform a search! We hope you'll give it a try and support OTA through this easy, convenient method.

The site is powered by Yahoo!, so you will get the same quality search results that you are used to. Last year, search engines generated close to \$6 billion in revenue from advertisers. With GoodSearch, part of this advertising revenue will now be directed to OTA. The more people who use this site, the more money will go to OTA. So please spread the word to your friends and family. You can send the link to your contact list directly from the GoodSearch web page: [www.goodsearch.com](http://www.goodsearch.com)

## SPECIAL THANKS

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Many people contributed to OTA's huge success over the holiday season. First, thank you to the volunteers who sorted and packed hundreds of cartons to ship overseas: *Bob & Peggy Graeser, Christopher Welch, Sue Siriani, Connie & Julie Kearns, Jennifer Plummer, Natalie & Soleil Nagoda, BJ Schneider, Mildred Bott, Shane Franchick, Kathy Kovalic and her 6<sup>th</sup> grade confirmation class at St. Cyril of Jerusalem.*

We were also blessed to benefit from the fundraising efforts of the following businesses:

- CleanTown USA Car Wash
- 1st & Goal Sports (Mark Caputo)
- Alexander's Athletic Club
- Sweet Spot Creamery (Frank Caputo)
- The Mall at Robinson

Thank you all so much for your generosity and never-ending support!

## CHRISTMAS IN AFGHANISTAN

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**Soldiers found wrapped presents...**



**...and unwrapped the Under Armour from OTA on Christmas day!**

OTA had the opportunity to work with a large company of soldiers from the 580<sup>th</sup> Signal Battalion living in difficult conditions in Afghanistan. 1<sup>st</sup> Sergeant Anthony Miller was looking to make the holidays brighter for his company of soldiers. He requested warm blankets and thermal Under Armour to keep the troops warm, as well as dart boards and DVDs to help them decompress after tough missions. This unit provides strategic and tactical communications in Afghanistan supporting Coalition and NATO/UN forces. They are housed in deteriorating wood buildings, in mountainous terrain and freezing temperatures.

OTA provided all 55 soldiers in the unit with a thermal Under Armour t-shirt and a warm fleece blanket, and enough MWR items for the troops to share. As you can see from their pictures and letters, these soldiers got a taste of Christmas even though they are far from home:

*I would like to thank you very much for the Under Armour T-shirt. I really appreciate it. And I would like to thank you again for taking the time and thinking about us during the holidays. ~ Sgt. A. M.*

*I'm currently serving with 1SG Miller of the 580th Signal Company. Ma'am, thank you and your team for the generous gifts that you've sent us; they're a true blessing in so many ways. From the ones that stand on the walls of freedom, so that others may sleep well at night: God-Bless you all! ~ SPC M.G.*

*I am very thankful for the gifts that you have sent to me and my family (580th Signal Company). If you could have only seen the expressions on our faces when we opened our wrapped presents, it would have melted your heart. Thank You So Much! May God continue to bless you and your family. ~ SPC S. J.*

*I would like to take this time to wish you and your awesome team that donated the great and on-time gifts to the soldiers deployed to Afghanistan. I can't thank you enough for all your assistance and support you have shown for many service members deployed. Thank you, thank you, thank you.... 1SG A. M.*



**Fleece blankets from OTA will help keep the soldiers warm this winter.**

## K-Rock 93.7 FM HOLIDAY AUCTION

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Every year, K-Rock Pittsburgh 93.7 FM gives listeners the opportunity to win rock memorabilia from famous bands. This year the station conducted an on-line auction with all proceeds going to Operation Troop Appreciation.

Guitars were donated and signed by artists such as Bon Jovi, Warrant, Godsmack, Nick Catanese of Black Label Society and other popular rock bands. Listeners could also bid on the chance to become on-air celebrities by hosting their favorite K-Rock specialty shows throughout the day.

OTA Vice President, Monica Orluk was a guest on the Live Lunch show hosted by dee jay Megan Slater to help promote the auction with Black Label Society guitarist, Nick Catanese, who signed the Black Label Society guitar.

The listeners of K-Rock raised \$4,000 for OTA's troops through this benefit



**OTA VP Monica Orluk with Black Label Society guitarist Nick Catanese, who donated a guitar for K-Rock's auction.**

auction. Thank you to all who bid on items! A special Thank You to Megan Slater of K-Rock and the entire staff at CBS Radio, whose continued support is greatly appreciated!

## ADOPT A UNIT

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OTA is proud to present the Adopt a Unit program, enabling those in the community to support our deployed troops. Launched for Christmas 2006, the program was so successful, OTA is extending the program as an ongoing initiative.

The adopting group receives an information sheet on the unit: a **photo, their mission, deployed location, home base, number of soldiers, "wish list," and the targeted donation amount** needed to fulfill the list.

Groups do their own fundraising and send their collections to OTA (along with cards and letters for the troops). OTA uses the funds to secure and send the "wish list" items to the adopted units.

Dozens of companies, individuals, churches, schools and civic groups have adopted units. We thank each of them for their generosity and compassion, and would like to share some of their special stories.



**The nurses raised over \$1,300 for two units with these snowmen!**

**UPMC McKeesport – Unit 3 Mansfield Nurses:** The nurses of UPMC McKeesport adopted the 647th Logistics Task Force Army unit, consisting of 19 soldiers.

One creative nurse made "Soldier Snowmen" to represent each soldier in the unit. All those who donated enough to adopt a soldier placed their name on the snowman and posted it on the adoption wall. Each snowman was dedicated to a family member or friend that served in the military.

The program spread to other departments, raising enough funds to adopt a second unit.

**John Minadeo Elementary School – Pittsburgh, PA:** Fifth grade math and social studies teacher (and veteran), Jack Zewe wanted his class to do more than just talk about the troops on Veteran's Day.

His class adopted the soldiers of C Company of the 1-501<sup>st</sup> Infantry who wished for phone cards. The fifth graders made posters to advertise their project, collected money for two weeks, and tracked the funds daily. In all they collected \$450, enough to send all 120 soldiers a phone card!

The students have become pen-pals with some of the soldiers, and are currently collecting school supplies for the soldiers to give to children in Iraq.



**One of the Minadeo students said he never realized how doing something so small could mean so much to others.**



**Streams students sent their letters, the banner and classroom pictures to the soldiers.**

**Streams Elementary School - Upper St. Clair, PA:** With a goal to collect \$280 to provide for the 28 soldiers in the 332 Expeditionary Logistics Readiness Squadron (Detachment 2), the Streams Outreach Committee organized an entire week of coin collections, theme days, and a letter writing campaign.

Some of the kids performed chores around the house to earn money, donated a week's allowance, or ran garage sales and hot chocolate stands. The school made a fireworks banner with student and faculty thumbprints to show that "Streams School was Bursting With Pride For Squadron 332." Far surpassing their goal of \$280, the students collected more than \$1,500, enabling the school to adopt another unit.

**Allegheny Hyde Park Elementary School – Leechburg, PA:** To kick off their week-long Veterans Day celebration, OTA VP Monica Orluk visited the school with Staff Sergeant Matthew Claycomb. He answered the children's questions about what life is like for a soldier in Iraq.

The children brought in pocket change to contribute to their "Silver for Soldiers" fundraiser. They were so enthusiastic and exceeded everyone's expectations for donations: the children raised more than \$2,300, and learned a valuable lesson in helping others.



*Principal Brian Kutchak, students and staff present a check to OTA President Kristen Holloway, with area veterans looking on.*

**The Katz Graduate School of Business/College of Business Administration of the University of Pittsburgh** held its annual Charity Event, donating their funds to OTA's Adopt a Unit program. The event is sponsored by the Katz Participation Team, who solicited from Katz/CBA staff, faculty, students, and external sources.

This year's event included a snowman ornament sale, bake sale, raffle, and silent auction. The total amount collected at this one-day event was an amazing \$2,100!

**Donaldson Elementary School – Oakdale, PA:** The students adopted the company of soldiers in the HHC 3-71 CALVALRY, 10TH Mountain Division, with a target donation level of \$1,240.

To raise the funds, the students conducted a "Cents for Soldiers" program, and for one week they collected pennies on Monday, nickels on Tuesday, dimes on Wednesday, quarters on Thursday and dollar bills on Friday.

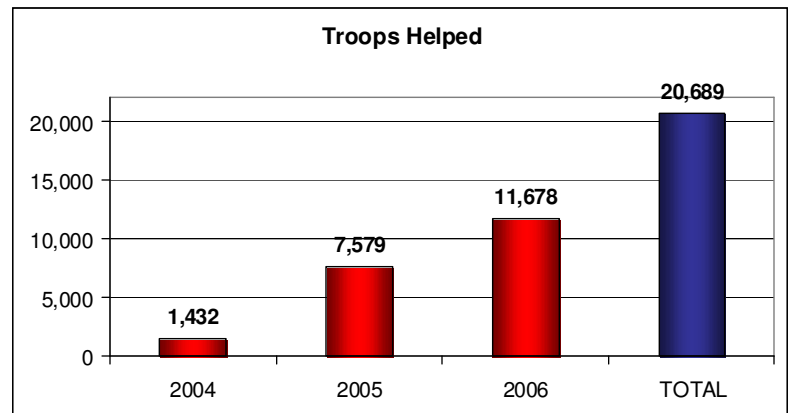
At the end of the week, they had collected over \$3,500 for the troops, far exceeding their original goal. What a great effort from a wonderful group of students!

## PROGRESS TO DATE

Many of the items we provide our troops are expensive (e.g., Under Armour, tactical gear and supplies), so we have a great need for financial contributions.

Only with your generosity can we insure our troops feel the love and support we send them from so many miles away. **We need your help. They need your help.**

**Operation Troop Appreciation**  
**PO Box 14550**  
**Pittsburgh, PA 15234**  
[www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org)



*More than 20,000 troops have received "wish list" items from OTA; we reached almost 12,000 during 2006.*



*OTA sent personal supplies and snacks to a company of U.S. Airmen training the Afghan army.*



*OTA sent this company of soldiers in Iraq tactical supplies like militech oil, boresnakes, spotting scopes and Nomex gloves.*



*Soldiers doing force protection in Baghdad show off the Under Armour OTA sent them.*

## MORE SUCCESS STORIES

Since our last newsletter in September, more than 6,000 deployed troops received "wish list" from OTA, bringing the number of troops who have benefited from OTA since inception to more than 20,000!

Here is a snapshot of some of these units, what they are doing, and what OTA provided:

<u>Branch</u>	<u>Mission</u>	<u>Wish List</u>
<b>Army</b>	This Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) is responsible for rebuilding schools, roads, bridges and training and equipping the Afghan National Army and Police.	Binoculars Garmin GPS
<b>Army</b>	An active duty unit from Schofield Barracks, HI, this unit helps build and stabilize the Iraqi government.	Dart boards Board games Books
<b>Navy</b>	This Civil Affairs unit from Ft. Bragg provides humanitarian assistance to Iraqi civilians.	DVDs Books
<b>Air Force</b>	This Air force unit lost an airman and wanted a token to remember him by.	Memorial dog tags
<b>Air Force</b>	This active duty Air Force unit from Holloman Air Force Base provides security in Afghanistan.	Winter gloves Hand warmers
<b>Marines</b>	An active duty Marine unit from 29 Palms, CA, patrols the Syria-Iraq border and trains the Iraqi police.	TV & DVDs PS2 & games Blankets
<b>Army</b>	From Ft. Riley, this army bomb squad's mission is to render safe any IEDs and unexploded ordnances to protect military personnel and civilians.	Ballistics glasses
<b>Hospital</b>	Staff at a military hospital in Iraq requested canvas bags to send the personal effects of their patients with them upon transfer to other hospitals.	500 drawstring canvas bags



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

Many of the troops we help send letters or emails to let us know how much OTA's letters and gifts have meant to them. Here are some of those messages...

Just wanted to say thank you for the Under Armour shirts. If you could have seen the looks on their faces when they received them. It was almost like a child at Christmas.  
~ SSG P. S., Army (Iraq)

I would like to thank you for the items that you sent. My scouts were real grateful for all that you are doing to support us as well as all of the other deployed throughout the world. Thank you and God bless all of you for what you are doing. ~ SFC. J. C., Army (Afghanistan)

I would like to thank all of you for all the great efforts in making this deployment an easier one. To tell you the truth, I had tears in my eyes when I read your letter. Your letter meant a lot to me. ~ Cpl. E G., USMC (Iraq)

Your contributions make life in the field much more bearable for all of us. Thank you for what you're all doing!  
~ LTJG A. H., Navy (Afghanistan)

