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## A MOMENT WITH MO

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### Dear OTA Supporters and Volunteers,

In this edition of the newsletter, I'd like to share a personal experience that encompasses the true meaning of troop support and giving. It is also a firsthand account of how vital our efforts are to the morale and welfare of our brave heroes. I hope you are as touched by this experience as I was.

The Marine's name is Chris and he is a reservist, flying from the West Coast to Pittsburgh for a four-day leave to be with his wife and new baby boy before embarking on his second deployment. After having spent 7 ½ months in the Al Anbar Province of Iraq, his unit was headed to Djibouti, a country in the eastern part of Africa, for a 14 month tour. He was not able to disclose information about his upcoming mission, however, it was pretty clear as to how important it was going to be. He was both excited and nervous about this deployment.

I had the good fortune to sit next to him on this flight. He told me how it was a miracle he was even on the plane. He and his wife couldn't afford to fly him home, not with a newborn in the family. His fellow Marines surprised him by all contributing to buy him a ticket to Pittsburgh, so he could see his son before he deployed.

Throughout our conversation, he repeatedly talked about how much he appreciates groups like OTA and the volunteers who demonstrate support in way of letters and packages. During his first deployment, there were a number of Marines whose only mail was from troop support organizations or family support groups. I shared stories about the work we do and this led to a conversation about Leatherman brand utility tools, a common item requested by Marines when they submit wishlist requests to OTA.

Chris told me a story about the Leatherman utility tool he received while deployed to Iraq. Returning to base from a mission, his unit was traveling a road frequently subjected to IED (improvised explosive device) attacks. The truck he was driving was hit by an IED, along with two others. Unable to leave the area, they were also being shot at by insurgents. Chris knew they had to get out of there and the only way that was going to happen was to fix the trucks. A mechanic by trade, he took his Leatherman utility tool and borrowed another. Climbing under his truck, he was able to make the needed repairs to not only his truck, but the two others as well, using nothing but the Leatherman tools. They made it back to base without suffering one casualty.

After telling me this story, he asked me if I realized how much of an impact that little tool had on his unit. He said, "Monica, that gift saved my life and the lives of my fellow Marines that day. I probably wouldn't be sitting here today without it. Thank you and thank everyone who works in your organization. Words cannot express the appreciation we feel for your efforts."

This story is proof positive that we all have a great impact on our brave heroes – be it through writing a letter, sending a care package or giving a Marine a utility tool. I am always amazed and honored when I have the chance to personally connect with our brave heroes. But this young man, his story and the few hours we spent together on this flight will remain in my heart forever.



Sincerely,

Monica Orluk  
Vice President

## MAY IS MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

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This month gives the nation a time to focus on our many expressions of appreciation and recognition of our armed services. Learn how you can support our military at [www.nmam.org](http://www.nmam.org).

**"A veteran** - whether active duty, retired, national guard, or reserve - is someone who, at one point in his or her life, wrote a blank check made payable to The **'United States of America'**, for an amount of **'up to and including my life.'**" ~Author unknown

## FACES FROM THE FRONT

Meet some of the troops who have touched our lives. Their smiles are our biggest reward!



*The sailors of this military police unit show off the Under Armour t-shirts and yummy snacks OTA sent them.*



*OTA sent Christmas decorations to a medical support team in Iraq. Specialist Schmidt made sure her troops had a great holiday!*



*This navy medical team, from Pensacola, FL, is responsible for establishing an Afghani hospital. OTA sent them board games, DVDs, magazines, and other entertainment items.*



*OTA sent the soldiers of this Civil Affairs unit fire retardant tactical gloves.*



*From Ft. Stewart, GA, this Armored unit provides route security, recon, and leads IED counter patrols in Iraq. OTA sent them heavy-duty military watches.*



*This military police detachment is stationed in a desolate area of Iraq. OTA sent this PA reserve unit DVDs, phone cards, snacks, and magazines.*



*OTA sent this signal company Under Armour t-shirts and ballistic eye glasses.*



*These Marines were thrilled with the Under Armour shirts OTA sent them.*

## WE ARE COMMITTED TO OUR COURAGEOUS...

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Operation Troop Appreciation (OTA) is dedicated to members of our Armed Forces serving and sacrificing for our country. By providing them with “wish list” items that contribute to their morale and aid in their missions, we present a united front to our deployed military by supporting them as individuals, for every one of them

- Memorializes our nation's past
- Sacrifices to maintain our nation's culture and freedoms
- Ensures the safety and freedom of our nation's future generations

Our mission is to build and sustain the morale of deployed troops, enabling them to complete their missions with the assurance that the American public supports and appreciates their selfless service and daily sacrifices.

## KEEPING FIT IN IRAQ

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When a group of soldiers wrote to us with this request, we couldn't resist: “My Soldiers currently live in sector for weeks at a time. They have no physical fitness equipment. We have been trying to get a Bowflex or something to help them sustain fitness and bring up their morale, but have been turned down by companies. If OTA can help, you would be a blessing to them. Thank you!”

How could we not help? So we got to work shopping for the best equipment at the best value. Volunteers spent a whole evening repackaging the equipment into boxes acceptable by the US Postal Service, and in a few weeks after their request, the troops had their gym. They wrote to let us know how much they appreciated the equipment.

*I can't express to you how happy the platoon was to receive your donation. The home gym was a hit with all the Soldiers. With your contribution, we have been able to implement a physical fitness program with everyone assigned to our police station.*

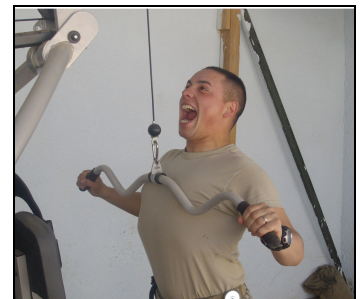
*As you know, we have been assigned to an Iraqi Police Station for several weeks at a time. With so many days away from the Military Base, maintaining our physical health was nearly impossible. Once we assembled the gym, everyone was so excited to put it to good use. The Soldiers were very receptive to incorporating fitness into their daily routine.*

*Before receiving the home gym, several Soldiers were unable to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test. Since receiving the gym, we have been able to combat this obstacle. Push ups are no longer a problem!*

*We are totally grateful. I have attached several pictures of the Soldiers using the gym set. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you for everything.*

*Sincerely,*

*The Buffest Platoon,  
The Boondock Saints*



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

Every week we receive letters and emails from our troops, letting us know how much OTA's gifts and support mean to them. Here are some of their messages...

"I have received your packages and would like to thank you so very much for supporting us over here. My fellow soldiers and I can't begin to explain how grateful we are to have people at home like you that take the time and effort to help us get through our deployment. It's Americans like you that make it all worth it." ~ *Specialist E. H., Army*

"We have received the guitar here in Baghdad. It is a very nice instrument and far exceeded our expectations.

We are already putting it to use and singing our hearts out. Words cannot express how grateful we are to your organization for providing this guitar, and also for supporting us in this way.

Our spirits stay lifted by knowing that there are individuals like yourself that think of us and are willing to provide the fine gifts we receive." ~ *CMC W.B, Navy*

"I returned recently from my R&R to find boxes of wonderful gifts from Operation Troop Appreciation. This extremely kind gesture from you and your organization is appreciated by every one of the soldiers in our unit. Your team at OTA is truly one of a kind." ~ *Major T. B., Army*

"Please tell your volunteers thank you so much and they are amazing people to do this for us. Your boxes definitely made a difference today. Care packages make our deployment a lot easier.

You and your volunteers are a big part of what keeps us going. The items we received today will definitely go to good use and the kindness that came from them it will go even farther. Thank you so much from the bottom of my heart!" ~ *Sergeant M. M., Army*

"We couldn't believe all the stuff you sent us. It really means a lot to us knowing that we have people supporting us. OTA is a fantastic organization. Sometimes you start to get a little discouraged or homesick and then you get a mail call and the kindness of strangers is so refreshing. It really warms my heart to know that there are people like you out there, willing to help people so far away that you don't even know." ~ *Specialist G. C., Army*

"I want to thank you personally for supporting the troops in a very big way. We appreciate the time and effort you put into this. This means so much to the troops over here in Kosovo. Thanks gain for the SUPPORT!" ~ *Staff Sergeant W. F., Army*

"My wife sent me a copy of your Winter 2008 newsletter and I read it with great interest.

As a soldier in the US Army, I can't thank you enough for your dedication, support and service to this nation in supplying the world's finest soldiers with much needed clothing, care packages, games and sports equipment. These items not only keep us warm and comfortable, but provide a connection to our society and give purpose to our mission.

A soldier's life is challenging enough; the same food is served every day, the pay is low, the hours are long and the conditions we work in are hazardous and the vehicles we operate are dangerous. We have little comfort in our daily lives, but you and your sponsors provided the much needed hope to continue the mission.

Your organization helped make the holidays more palatable by providing boxes full of surprise gifts. The school supplies you sent help our civil affairs teams establish good-will with the local community leaders.

Your organization has given hope and purpose to many of us soldiers serving in the Middle East. I want to personally thank you for what you have done for my family, our community, and the soldiers serving this great nation." ~ *Lieutenant Colonel J. F.*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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Don't miss your chance to participate in fun upcoming events to support our troops!

### May 17: Faculty Flag Football

Canon McMillan and Trinity faculty members are getting together to play a flag football game for the troops. Join us when the teachers get down and dirty in an all-out test of football prowess as they raise money for Operation Troop Appreciation. The event is Saturday, May 17, at 7 p.m. at the Canon McMillan Middle School. Tickets are \$3 in advance, \$5 at the door. Contact Jon Gasbarrini, 724-328-1555 for more information.



### May 19: Come Golf for the Troops!

Spring is here and it's time to dust off the clubs and head to the links! Join us for the **Third Annual OTA Charity Golf Outing, May 19**, at the Rolling Hills Country Club in McMurray Pa.

It's scramble play, with a shotgun start at noon. Enjoy a wonderful day of golf for only \$150 per golfer that includes a boxed lunch, green fees, cart, banquet dinner, door prizes and a silent auction.



Slots are open but filling fast – register now to guarantee your spot for this awesome event! We are actively seeking sponsors and donations of items to use as raffle and door prizes. If you are interested in golfing or being a sponsor, please contact Bob Reese at (412) 884-0208, [rreese@comcast.net](mailto:rreese@comcast.net) or Gary Storie at (724) 413-6147, [Gary.Storie@fcfins.com](mailto:Gary.Storie@fcfins.com)

### August 23: Win Clay's Chopper

Clay Kollar's life revolves around motorcycles. Every year he designs and builds a custom old-school chopper-style motorcycle, and then holds a huge party to give it away! This year, he decided that the bike and the party will benefit Operation Troop Appreciation. Adorned with images of soldiers OTA has helped, this one-of-a-kind OTA bike will be a lasting tribute to all who have served in the past and those who serve today.



This year's party will be held on August 23, 2008 at the Ice Garden in Rostraver. Tickets are \$30 in advance, \$45 at the door and include:

- Two chances to win the OTA Chopper, based on the 7 p.m. PA Lottery Big 4 Drawing on August 23, 2008
- Concert performances by Molly Hatchet and Blackfoot and a number of local bands
- Food and Beverages

A "Dice Run" will be held prior to the party and the winner will receive a 2008 Harley Davidson Sportster!

Molly Hatchet and Blackfoot have each donated autographed guitars that are being raffled off. Each ticket is \$2 and gives you two chances to win!

You don't want to miss the chance to attend the biggest party in the 'Burgh! Tickets are on sale now! To get yours, contact Monica Orluk, 412-759-0696 or order securely on-line at [www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org)

Go to [www.winclayschopper.com](http://www.winclayschopper.com) to see pictures of the work in progress and to learn about events that Clay will be attending with the bike over the summer.



**Show off your support for the troops!**

Remember to get your OTA gear on-line at [www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org](http://www.OperationTroopAppreciation.org)

## REMEMBERING THE SOLDIERS DURING LENT

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The 335 Religious Education students in grades kindergarten through eighth at St. John Capistran Church in Upper St. Clair, PA adopted a unit serving in Iraq as their Lenten Project. Their goal was \$900, which would enable all soldiers in their adopted unit to receive fire-retardant gloves, ballistic eye protective glasses, and tactical flashlights.

To kick off the Lenten project, Sergeant Michael Fisher from the PA Army National Guard, and OTA Board member, spoke to the children about OTA and what it is like to serve as a member of the US military. The students had many questions for Sgt. Fisher, and he patiently answered each one of them.

To meet their goal, the children shared their allowance, or donated money they would have otherwise spent on snacks at school. Some even took money they received for Christmas or their birthday and donated it to help reach their goal.

With the help of generous parishioners, the children raised double their goal, and also collected needed snack, hygiene and entertainment items for the troops, and even made Easter cards! The children and their project were truly blessed, and the soldiers on the receiving end of their generosity surely felt the love these children sent them from so far away.



**The Religious Education students at St. John Capistran raised over \$1800 for OTA soldiers and collected needed items the troops requested.**

## OTA CELEBRATES ST. PATRICK'S DAY WITH LOCAL SOLDIERS

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For the fourth consecutive year, Operation Troop Appreciation marched with soldiers in Pittsburgh's annual St. Patrick's Day Parade.

This year, OTA volunteers marched alongside members of the PA National Guard 128th Support Battalion and the Army Reserve 316th Military Police Company.

As always, the great citizens of Pittsburgh showed their support through cheers, handshakes and lots of hugs as the soldiers handed out candy to parade watchers.



**OTA Volunteers and soldiers gather to march in Pittsburgh's 2008 St. Patrick's Day Parade.**



**A member of the 316th Military Police Company hands out candy along the parade route.**

## LONG DISTANCE VALENTINES

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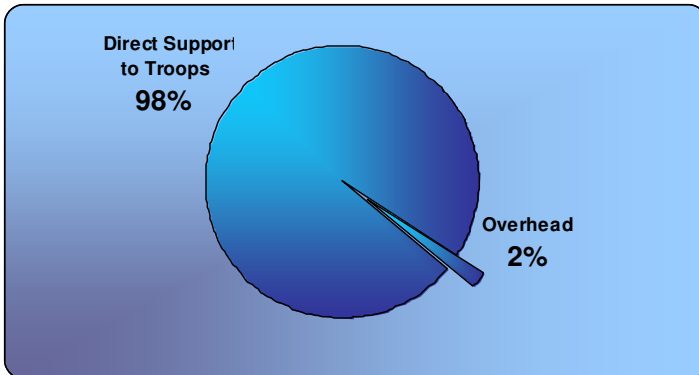
Students at Lincoln Elementary School in Mt. Lebanon made Valentine's Day special for troops this year. The students collected life savers and made home-made cards that OTA sent to deployed troops. Lincoln art teacher Jill Majestic and Lincoln parents Betsy Brubaker and Cara Reese coordinated this sweet initiative.

This isn't the first time these students have sent their love and appreciation to the troops. Last Halloween, the children donated 1,000 pounds of their Halloween candy to the troops.

**Right: The students display the home made Valentine's Day cards and the candy they collected for the troops.**

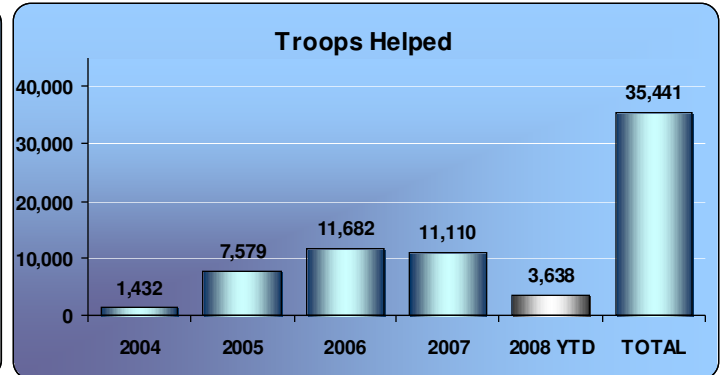


## PROGRESS TO DATE



*OTA is an all-volunteer organization with minimal overhead expenses. As a result, 98 cents of every dollar we spend directly supports our troops in the field.*

*Very few charities can boast this high efficiency rate.*



*OTA has provided "wish list" items for more than 35,000 troops since our inception in July 2004.*

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

Only with your generosity can we continue to insure our troops feel the love and support we send them from home.

You may make a secure on-line donation, or send contributions to us at:

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

## SPECIAL THANKS

Many businesses have been very generous with their time, talent and contributions. We would like to especially thank the following for their continued support and generosity so freely given on behalf of our troops. Please show them your appreciation for their support of OTA with your patronage.

We would like to thank Arnie Thompson, Army veteran and owner of **McCabe Printing**, and his dedicated staff. McCabe Printing has donated its printing services to OTA for several years, enabling OTA to conserve funds and direct more money to our troop projects. OTA is grateful for his and his staff's kindness and generosity.

**Pittsburgh Athletic Association** recognized OTA at their annual Mercury Awards Dinner, highlighting the best high school football athletes in the area. Jeannette's Tyrell Pryor was the recipient of this year's Mercury Award and the first two-time winner in PAA history. The evening also honored former Pitt Football coach, Jackie Sherill. The PAA donated a portion of the night's proceeds to OTA as they have done for the past three years.

OTA would like to extend our deep gratitude to **Allied Waste** and CEO Denny Marchetti for a generous donation to OTA in support of our "Adopt a Unit" program. They have shown great corporate dedication to our troops, and we are grateful they have chosen to support our American heroes through our organization.



*Former Pitt and Dallas Cowboy star, Tony Dorsett, with OTA President Kristen Holloway and VP Monica Orluk at the PAA dinner.*

## MORE SUCCESS STORIES

Since our last newsletter update, 3,600 more deployed troops received “wish list” items from OTA, bringing the total number of troops who have benefited from OTA to over 35,000! Here is a snapshot of some of these units, what they are doing, and what OTA provided.

<b>Branch</b>	<b>Mission</b>	<b>Wish List</b>
Army	This infantry battalion secures the area of Baqubah, Iraq. They rid the area of terrorists, rebuild the infrastructure, and support the local population	Web cams, video games and DVDs
Army	From Ft. Lewis, Washington, these soldiers provide dental support to soldiers throughout Iraq.	Dental scrubs
Air Force	From Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, these airmen evacuate wounded coalition forces from the battlefield in Afghanistan.	Toiletries, snacks, DVDs
Army	This is aviation support unit from Ft. Campbell, KY serving in Afghanistan needed supplies for their MWR (morale, welfare, recreation) center on base.	Popcorn machine and popcorn, coffee makers and coffee
Navy	This naval unit protects the waters of the 7th fleet in the waters near Japan and North Korea.	Towels, t-shirts, snacks, magazines
Marines	This Marine squadron provides maintenance, supply and logistic support for the flying squadrons. They set up a lounge so the Marines can relax after missions.	Video game consoles and gaming supplies
Army	This National Guard unit provides security force for a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Afghanistan	Weapons cleaning kits, phone cards, MP3 players



## GREENBRIAR TREATMENT CENTER GETS BEHIND THE TROOPS



On February 29, Ken Montrose presented *Ethics in the Helping Professions* to raise funds for OTA. The event was held at Greenbriar Treatment Center's newly-opened Wexford site, and raised over \$1500 to benefit troops serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also collected other needed items for OTA to send to the troops.

Before Mr. Montrose's presentation, two young soldiers, one in dress uniform, the other in fatigues, stood before a crowd of 75 people, and described their experiences in the military. John Groves spoke about his two tours of duty, and without labeling them as such, the sacrifices he made for his country. Bob Catto, whose mother works for Greenbriar, discussed his preparations for his first trip to Iraq. Without a hint of complaint, he described how his commitment to the Army Reserves changed his civilian life.

To honor these men and others serving in the military, Greenbriar waived its usual \$45 fee for these trainings, asking instead for a donation to OTA. Greenbriar also paid the \$10 certification fee for each social worker.

Two more Operation Troop Appreciation trainings have been scheduled. Mr. Montrose will present *Ethics in the Helping Professions* again at Greenbriar's New Kensington office on Friday, June 13, 2008 and at Greenbriar's Robinson office on Friday, September 12, 2008. The fees for these trainings will be waived and donations will again be accepted on behalf of Operation Troop Appreciation. Both training sessions are accredited for six hours for Pennsylvania social workers, employee assistance counselors, and addiction counselors. The training meets the ethics requirement for both social workers and addiction counselors. For information about these trainings, please contact Ken Montrose at (724) 934-8435 or [kmontrose@greenbriar.net](mailto:kmontrose@greenbriar.net).