



Fall 2008 Newsletter

KRISTEN'S CORNER

Dear OTA Supporters and Volunteers,

Three and a half years ago in April 2005, Captain Charles Querriera of Bravo Company 1-13 Armor battalion contacted OTA. He had heard about us from his brother and some friends of his, who were all also friends of mine, and they recommended he contact us to get support for his deployed unit. Charles requested clothing and shoes for his soldiers to give out to the very poor children in the neighborhood they were patrolling.

You see, aside from their regular missions of searching out insurgents, they were also working closely with the local population to restore peace and prosperity in the area villages, and help instill in the Iraqi people a sense of security and trust in the American forces.

After sending these supplies, and seeing the smiling faces of the soldiers and children in their new clothes, OTA wanted to do something for the soldiers of this unit, and worked with



Captain Charles Querriera gives new clothes to the local Iraqi children.

Captain Querriera to provide some things that would help his soldiers – such as a weight-lifting machine, movies, and coffee supplies.

Captain Querriera and I continued to correspond after our project with his company and struck up a friendship through email and the occasional phone call.

He invited me to visit him in Los Angeles during his mid-tour break in August 2005 so we could meet and spend some time getting to know each other. After he returned to Iraq, our friendship deepened and we

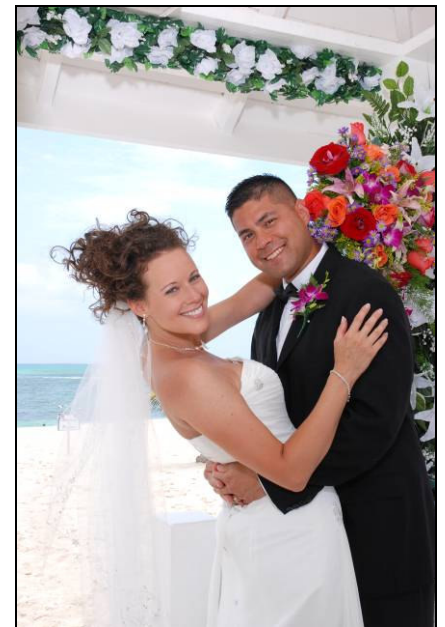
couldn't wait to see each other again. We would have to wait until January 2006 for that chance, and I welcomed him home when he returned for good to Fort Riley, Kansas, after two tours in Iraq.

We began dating long-distance while he lived in Kansas, and after he left the army to return to his home in Los Angeles. Traveling back and forth across the country between Pittsburgh and Los Angeles for two years to see each other as often as we could, Charles and I fell in love and were engaged on Valentines Day 2008 during a visit he made to Pittsburgh. He must have loved me a lot to leave sunny California and move to Pittsburgh!

Four months later, on June 14 – Flag Day – we were married on a beautiful beach in the Bahamas, surrounded by our family and closest friends in a dream wedding.

Every morning I wake up and can't believe that I am married to this wonderful and handsome man.

I think of all the soldiers who have received gifts from OTA over the years, and can't believe any could have been as wonderful as the gift I got from OTA – my soul mate and best friend.



Charles and I married on June 14, 2008 in a beautiful beach wedding in the Bahamas.

Sincerely,

Kristen (Holloway) Querriera
President & Founder

PRESIDENT BUSH HONORS OTA... AGAIN



President George W. Bush poses for a photo with Kristen Holloway Sept. 8, 2008, before delivering remarks on volunteerism on the South Lawn at the White House. White House photo by Eric Draper.

Award Winner honored by President Bush in March 2006 at the steps of Air Force One, I and the hundreds of previous volunteers he'd met over the years received an invitation to return to the White House for this special speech. But four days before the speech, the White House contacted me to tell me that President Bush would be making special mention of OTA, which also offered an opportunity to visit the White House and meet the President once more.

Right before the September 8th speech, the six other "speech mentions" were gathered in a beautiful room in the White House to meet the President. I had my picture taken with him, and we were able to say a few words to each other. Out of my mouth came, "It's such an honor to meet you again Mr. President. Thank you so much for having me," while my mind was saying, "I wish I had made one more trip to the ladies room because I feel like a little yippy dog that leaks all over the place when it meets a new person!"

The President told me he was going to mention me from the speech, and I told him how much I appreciated that and looked forward to that. Then we were escorted to our seats on the South Lawn by the military and I was finally able to catch my breath and come back to Earth.

There were tons of military crawling all over the place, including the very sharp-looking Marines in dress blues who guard the White House and the President. So, I introduced myself to all of them, thanked them for their service, gave them my OTA card, and told them to contact me if they got deployed. I am always still amazed at how gracious our military is, and how thankful they are for what OTA does. They are just the most unassuming, aw-shucks kind of folks, and even though

It started as an "ordinary" invitation to go to the White House to listen to President Bush's speech on volunteerism. But it turned into an incredible honor for OTA, as the President complimented OTA on our important work in support of deployed troops.

As a previous Volunteer Service

they have all these ribbons and ropes and medals hanging all over them, they are so humble.

Once we were on the South Lawn, the 25 minute speech began and the President talked about how important volunteering is, and highlighted each of about 6 volunteers. He saved OTA for last, and I was thrilled that he gave the most air time to OTA. He acknowledged me as he mentioned me for the first time, and then again as he sat down a few seats away in the row in front of me at the end of his speech.

Of OTA, he said...

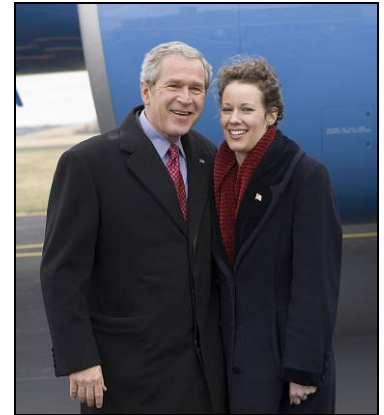
"One such volunteer is a young woman I met in Pittsburgh named Kristen Holloway. She started a program called Operation Troop Appreciation. It started off as kind of a small program, just an idea, a desire to make a statement. Her group collects everything from DVDs and phone cards to musical instruments and sports gear. So far, they have sent care packages to more than 40,000 men and women serving in the front lines in this war against the extremists.

Kristen, we're glad you're here. I want to tell you what a soldier wrote to Kristen's group. A soldier wrote back after getting one of the packages and said, "My heart soars with pride to represent a country filled with such wonderful people as [you]." That was the thank you note that Kristen's group got.

Well, my heart soars with pride as well to be in the presence of those who are lifting up souls and helping mend hearts. I want to thank you for what you're doing. I am incredibly optimistic about the future of our country. And the reason I am is because I've seen firsthand the love and the compassion and the decency of our fellow citizens.

May God bless you. May God bless the armies of compassion."

It was a day to remember, that's for sure, and I will forever be humbled that the President and his staff thought enough about our modest little non-profit here in Pittsburgh to call attention to our work.



During our first meeting on March 22, 2006 in Wheeling, WV.

FACES FROM THE FRONT

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



These infantry soldiers defend bases in Iraq. They live on a remote base with almost no access to basic supplies. OTA sent them needed personal and recreation "wish list" items.



OTA was proud to send these Military Police in Iraq sports equipment and personal care items. These soldiers are Reservists from New York.



The ballistic glasses OTA sent to two platoons of Alpha Troop, 1/3 ACR in Iraq were a big hit! These glasses will keep the troops safer as they conduct patrols in dangerous areas.



From Oakdale, PA near Pittsburgh, these soldiers were happy to receive snack, personal care and recreation items from OTA. We are happy to be able to work for our soldier neighbors!



OTA sent the soldiers of Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) Mektar Lam a professional bingo kit, complete with a bingo cage, cards and markers for their weekly tournaments.



These soldiers from Ft. Campbell, KY, were happy to receive boxes of their favorite snacks from OTA. These military police train the Iraqi Army.



OTA sent these soldiers from Ft. Hood, TX, sports equipment and DVDs. This unit provides combat outpost, personal security, counter insurgency operations and logistics patrols in Iraq.

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 am writing to show our appreciation for your continued support of the Soldiers in my brigade, currently serving in Iraq.

Thank you so much for keeping our well-being in mind and for keeping us entertained with items such as the bocce ball set that definitely helps to maintain great morale, not to mention physical fitness. Your efforts will forever remain in our thoughts and hearts." ~ *Command Sergeant Major J. H.*

"Thank you so much for the packages and letters you have sent to my company. Times like this are hard when you are away from your family in a place unfamiliar.

Your gifts and letters have made it easier for each of us. Please know that what you have sent has been shared among many, your gifts have gone very far. Thank you for that." ~ *Sergeant S. B.*

"Thank you so much for the care packages and your support. Your packages came on the perfect day for me actually. It came on my 26th birthday. When the mail came today, your package certainly brightened my day.

My soldiers and I greatly appreciate the socks. It's a wonderful feeling when you get to put on a soft pair of new socks for the first time in a long time." ~ *Sergeant L. T.*

"Thanks so much for OTA. I had to have surgery in Baghdad at the Military Hospital, from there I went to another city in Iraq awaiting transportation out of the country. Upon arriving at the holding station, we were given items from your organization. Thanks so much for caring and thinking of us Army soldiers and other Armed Forces serving here in Southwest Asia." ~ *Lieutenant Colonel D. Z.*

HELPING THE GOOD GUYS GET THE BAD GUYS!

One of our favorite letters came from a soldier we sent a GPS system to for use in his Infantry platoon....

"I did get the packages and they were even more than we could have expected. Thank you all very much. The tactical items you sent we have used almost everyday and have greatly helped our mission. In fact the Garmin GPS that was sent, we actually used to help detain a suspect involved in planting IEDs in our area. We had air support helping us look for him after he fled a building in a raid and we saw where he fled to but lost him. The aircraft spotted him and sent us the grid coordinates and we were able to walk right up to where he was hiding." Staff Sergeant M.E.

How cool is that?!

WE ARE COMMITTED TO OUR COURAGEOUS...

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 raise their morale and aid in the success and safety of 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.

A SOLDIER COMES HOME



Donnie's unit, B Troop, 2-235 AIR, with the care packages sent by OTA.

For those of you who are faithful readers of our newsletter, you may remember first being introduced to Sergeant Donnie Wyant, a soldier with the 82nd Airborne, whose unit received help from OTA during their recent deployment to Iraq. OTA sent packages to his unit to help ease the burden of their deployment.

But that was only the beginning of OTA's involvement with Donnie. Donnie was granted leave during his deployment and planned a great surprise for his family, which we featured in the Fall 2007 Newsletter article "Surprise, Surprise! One Soldier's Special Gift." This article revolved around Donnie's 2-week

leave and visit home to South Bend, Indiana, where he showed up to his mother Eileen's company for a surprise visit.

Donnie has since returned home from his deployment, but the story doesn't end there.

On a recent business trip to South Bend, OTA VP Monica Orluk had the pleasure of meeting Donnie and spending time with members of his family who have become great supporters of OTA. Having the opportunity to welcome this brave soldier home and hear how much the gifts he received helped him with his deployment was truly an honor. He felt it very important that everyone who helps with OTA understand the impact they make every day on the lives of our brave soldiers.

The visit was bittersweet as Monica learned that Donnie, who has since transferred to a new unit, is being deployed again to Iraq in November. OTA will be there to support this unit as well.

We wish Donnie and all those serving with him the best as they embark on this mission. May God bless them and bring them home safely.



Donnie greets his mother Eileen at a surprise reunion at her office.



Donnie and OTA VP Monica finally meet for a long-overdue hug!

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN! DONATE TO OTA THROUGH UNITED WAY AND CFC

Did you know you can donate directly to OTA through the United Way and the Combined Federal Campaign?

Simply designate Operation Troop Appreciation on your annual giving contribution form with the following codes:

- United Way Agency #1525287
- CFC Code # 94786 (in Southwest PA and Ohio Valley only)



By supporting OTA with these campaigns, you'll be helping OTA make sure our troops are taken care of throughout 2009.

COMMUNITY DONATIONS PROVIDE FOR HUNDREDS OF TROOPS

In August, we began to worry about our dwindling supply of items on hand for care package requests. Having recently packed dozens of large boxes, the “cupboards were bare,” but soldier requests were still coming in fast and furious. That’s when a grocery store chain, a shopping club, and the Army joined forces to help restock OTA’s shelves.

West Virginia Kroger Stores Demonstrate Troop Support

It was an early morning in August when OTA VP, Monica Orluk received a phone call from Major James Akers of the West Virginia 38th RSG Command Team. Maj. Akers informed her that 39 Kroger stores in WV had conducted a donation drive for the troops and were looking for a good organization that could get them to some needy soldiers. He learned of OTA through fellow soldier, Major John Dowling of the Army Reserve in Pittsburgh. Major Dowling was quick to give him Monica’s number and this began a chain of events that resulted in OTA sending dozens of cartons to Iraq and Afghanistan.



Some of the items generously donated by the Kroger grocery stores.

Kroger delivered the items to the Reserve Center in Charleston, WV. Soldiers from the Reserve Center transported the items to the Reserve Center in Coraopolis, PA where National guardsmen, SSG Aaron Layton loaded them up for delivery to OTA.

This teamwork allowed OTA to provide care packages for hundreds of soldiers. Thank you to **John Hoe of Kroger** and **all the soldiers** who worked so diligently to get these items to OTA!

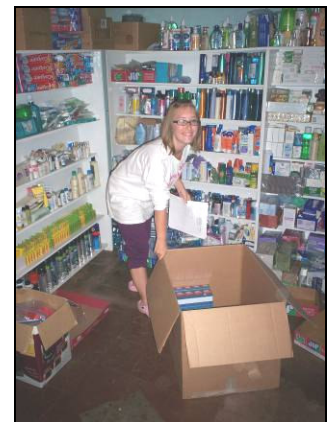


OTA Volunteers stocking the shelves after unloading the bus.

Sam’s Club “Stuff a Bus” for Soldiers!

On September 13th and 20th, **Sam’s Club** in Robinson with the help of the **Parkway West Rotary Club**, the **Montour School District**, and the **Montour School Interact Club**, held a “Stuff a Bus” collection drive to help OTA stuff its own care packages for the troops. These groups and the generous shoppers outdid themselves to fill the shelves at OTA.

As the stuffed school bus rolled up, OTA volunteers were on hand to unload, sort and shelve the items. What an amazing sight to see the seats and the aisles packed with snacks and personal care items! The soldiers on the receiving end have these wonderful folks to thank for their “wish list” items!



Volunteers boxes of “wish list items” for the troops.

Packing Parties for the Troops

On September 13th & 20th, OTA volunteers gathered to pack boxes for the troops. Thank you to everyone who gave their time and energy to these great events!

A special note of thanks to the volunteers from **Duquesne Light** who, despite having worked many hours of overtime to help restore power to thousands of Pittsburgh-area residents who lost power during wind storms, turned out to pack on September 20th and brought with them many, many items they themselves collected to send to the troops!



Operation Troop Appreciation is **always** in need of donated items to fulfill our troops’ “wish list” requests.

If you, your company, church, school or civic group are in the **Pittsburgh area** and would like to hold a collection or fundraising drive for OTA, please contact us. Groups and individuals **nationwide** can also “adopt” a unit as part of a fundraising effort.

Please contact Vice President Monica Orluk for a list of needed items, collection guidelines, and adoption information at 412-759-0696 or littlemo34@yahoo.com

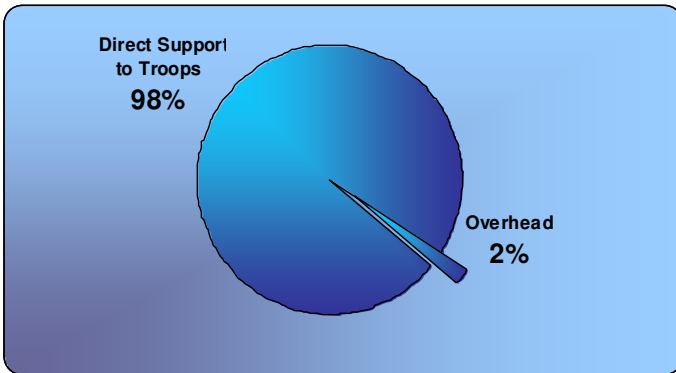
SPECIAL THANKS

Many businesses and civic groups 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 and support.

OTA receives many requests for sporting goods, and golf equipment is often at the top of that list. Now when we get those requests, OTA can quickly answer the call thanks to the generosity of **Mark Martens, of the Golf Shop in McMurray, PA**. Mark has not only donated hundreds of clubs and thousands of golf balls to OTA, but he has also directly shipped hundreds of these items to our troops serving overseas. His passion for golf extends thousands of miles to Iraq and Afghanistan, and because of him, hundreds of troops will enjoy some “greens time” in a war zone. Thank you, Mark, for your kind generosity!

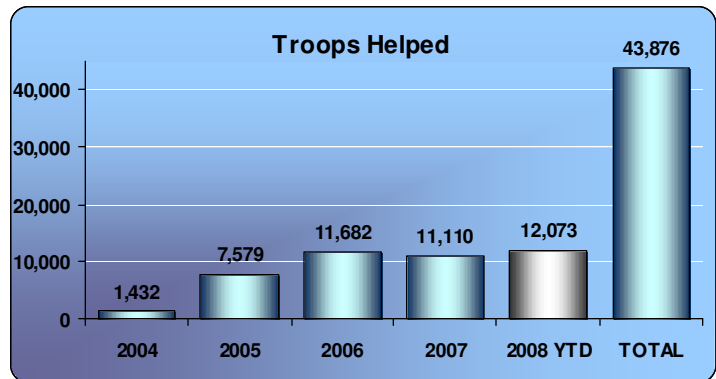
OTA frequently receives requests for healthy energy drinks that help our troops maintain hydration and nutritional balance while working in extreme weather conditions. **Quixtar** has answered the call by offering their business customers the chance to donate cases of energy drinks to our troops through OTA. The Quixtar team recently attended a drill weekend at the Hunt Armory, providing free drinks for PA National Guardsmen while getting feedback on what products they liked the best. Many thanks to Ed Helbling, Michelea Heckman and the sponsors of Quixstar’s program for contributing nearly 100 cases of energy drinks.

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 43,000 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. Every dollar matters!

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

PPG HELPS ONE OF ITS OWN

When he heads over to Iraq in a few months, Specialist Jason Saylor will have a new laptop to stay in touch with his friends, family and co-workers. The gift was made possible by his colleagues at PPG, who wanted to give Jason a symbol of their support and friendship.

The Human Resources director at the manufacturing plant where Jason works contacted OTA President Kristen Holloway, who also works for PPG. He asked if she and OTA would be willing to support Jason with a lap top computer. Jason's colleagues "adopted" him through OTA's [Adopt a Unit](#) Program, and completed a fundraiser that would help OTA purchase the laptop.

Jason will be deployed to Iraq in early 2009 with the 110th Infantry from Connellsville, PA, and thanks to the folks at PPG, he won't be too far away to keep in contact with his generous co-workers.



Jason's colleagues present him with his own laptop. Left to right: Jay Bowes, Dave McGranahan, Perry Johnson, Jason Saylor, Sue Stites, and Colleen Custard.

LOCAL SOLDIERS DEPLOY



The 28th Infantry Division has been called upon once again to aid in combat operations in the Middle East, resulting in the deployment of many soldiers from across the state of Pennsylvania, many of whom live in and around OTA's home in Pittsburgh. These PA National Guardsmen will form new units within the 56th Brigade Combat Team (BCT) that are part of the prestigious Stryker BCT. The 56th BCT is the nation's only reserve component Stryker BCT in existence and is a proud part of the nation's oldest division, the 28th Infantry Division, Pennsylvania's own National Guard. The 56th has been training extensively in preparation for eventual deployment with the Army's newest combat vehicle, the Stryker.

Soldiers going on this deployment come from units across the state of Pennsylvania. Many of these soldiers are from units within the 1-110th Infantry Battalion which is spread throughout southwestern PA. At the present time the 56th BCT is composed of 100% Pennsylvanians and as the only National Guard Stryker Brigade in existence, holds a very prestigious place in history.

On Friday, September 19th, these men boarded buses to link up with the units that they have been transferred into, eventually making their way to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. At Camp Shelby they will continue intensive training to prepare for deployment in early 2009 into Iraq. OTA was there to serve coffee and wish them well. Many of these soldiers have marched with us on St. Patrick's Day, participated in OTA events, and have become good friends.

Their families will continue to rely on the local unit's Family Readiness Group (FRG) and support team to keep them informed and provide emotional and personal support throughout deployment.

Of course, OTA will be here for the soldiers during their deployment, and we look forward to supporting our friends and neighbors who selflessly serve. In fact, we have already sent some needed items to a platoon who needed some supplies during training and can't wait to do more.

These Soldiers continue a proud tradition of service and sacrifice that is part of the Citizen Soldier's heritage. Our hearts and prayers go out to them for a successful completion of mission and a speedy return home to their loved ones. God Speed!

If you are interested in learning more about supporting these local troops through their FRG group, please contact OTA VP, Monica Orluk at 412-759-0696.

DONATE FREQUENT FLYER MILES THROUGH HERO MILES!

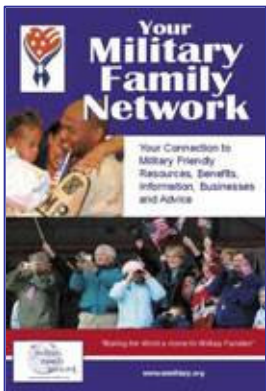


The **Fisher House Foundation** administers the **Hero Miles Program** which is comprised of individual airlines whose passengers donate their frequent flyer miles to assist service members and their families.

Specifically, Fisher House Foundation provides free airline tickets to military men and women who are undergoing treatment at a military or VA medical center incident to their service in Iraq or Afghanistan. They also provide airline tickets to military families to visit their recovering wounded warriors.

With the public's support, they have provided more than 15,000 tickets to Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom hospitalized service members and their families. Please visit www.fisherhouse.org and follow the link to the Hero Miles page to learn more about how you can donate your miles and make a difference in these brave soldiers' lives.

MILITARY LIFE DOESN'T COME WITH INSTRUCTIONS – UNTIL NOW!



The Military Family Network has published a 650-page resource book, ***Your Military Family Network***, for the military community. The book contains over 55 chapters of information covering everything from enlistment to retirement. The handbook's well-stocked appendices offer state resources, information on community organizations, and every branch of Service. There is a glossary for military terms and jargon and Presidential candidate Senator John McCain crafted the book's foreword.

Readers will find answers to such questions as:

How do I create a budget and what should I know about my finances? How do I PCS? How should I prepare for deployment? What are my health benefits? What is PTSD and how can I get help? How do I develop a personal support network? What do I do when I lose my service member? Who can I talk to about my veteran benefits? What educational opportunities are available to me and my family? How do I transition into civilian life and use my military experience to find an employer? Where can I go for legal assistance? How can I find help in my community? How do I find an organization supporting troops? What is operational security?

Service members, veterans and families learn to use their skills to develop relationships and support networks before they need them. "Your Military Family Network is a book unlike anything the military community has experienced," said Megan Turak, Executive Vice President of The Military Family Network. "Not only is it a 'one-stop-shop' that saves research time by housing life topics and military subject matter under one roof, it is also a gateway to connecting with the providers of those programs, services, benefits and resources."

Besides how-to sections that build skills for developing relationships, researching information and discovering community resources, the book's chapters provide an introduction to the subject matter, a need-to-know and a frequently-asked-questions section along with where to go for more information.

As an interactive tool, the book is a call to action for military individuals to engage with experts and organizations who have contributed their knowledge and to reach out to additional resources available on The Military Family Network website at www.militaryfamilynetwork.com. By doing this, military service members, veterans and their families create their own personal support network and stand prepared and ready to successfully manage their military life and career regardless of what life throws their way.

If you would like to order a copy of ***Your Military Family Network***, visit www.militaryfamilynetwork.com/yourmfnet.html. If you would like to sponsor this book for members of the military community, please contact Luis Trevino at (866) 205-2850 or lou@emilitary.org.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 8 and 9: Craft & Gift Show

Place: Crowne Plaza Hotel, 1160 Thorn Run Road, Moon Township



This show, sponsored by **Clearview FCU**, will feature jewelry, candles, framed art, baked goods, purses, numerous brand name items, and much more! There is definitely something for everyone on your holiday shopping list! The event, which benefits OTA, runs from 9 am to 2 pm. For more information, call Michelle at 412-269-3025.

November 9: Veteran's Day 5K Race

Place: Hampton Community Park, Pittsburgh



Mark your calendars and get ready to run in the 3rd Annual **Veteran's Day 5K race** in Hampton Township, PA, Sunday, November 9, 2008. Last year over 200 runners participated in this great event. Go to OTA's website for registration, or contact race coordinator Alice McLaughlin at gerardmac977@aol.com for questions.

WIN CLAY'S CHOPPER

Words cannot express the gratitude we have for Clay Kollar, who built the OTA chopper and put on the best party in OTA history! Molly Hatchet, Blackfoot, The Klick and Mean Streets put on great performances and the crowd had a wonderful time.



Blackfoot performs "Highway Song"



Molly Hatchet "Flirtin' With Disaster"

While no one won the chopper (winning ticket #1278 was not sold), Clay is holding a limited edition drawing of 1,000 tickets – so you still have a chance to win this beautiful bike below! Contact Clay directly at clay@winclayschopper.com or 412-303-5768 to order your tickets today!

