

Lt. Governor Pat Quinn presents 18 "Homefront Hero Awards"



CHICAGO - November 23, 2008. With Thanksgiving just around the corner, Lt. Governor Pat Quinn presented Homefront Hero Awards to 18 individuals and organizations, saluting their patriotism and efforts to lift the morale of Illinois servicemembers deployed overseas.

The Homefront Hero Awards are presented to people and organizations who are making a special effort to help our servicemembers, military families and veterans.

"Just days before we gather with our friends and family to celebrate Thanksgiving, I am proud to honor these Homefront Heroes for their hard work and patriotism," Quinn said. "I thank them for their efforts in supporting our men and women in uniform. These individuals, and the organizations they represent, are shining examples of how everyday people can make an extraordinary difference."

An estimated 2,900 servicemembers from the 33rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team stationed throughout Illinois began movements to deploy this summer. By the time the holiday season rolls around, the entire brigade will be based in Afghanistan.

"It is important to remember our servicemembers and their families, especially as increasing numbers of our Illinois Armed Forces are being called to action," Quinn said. "Military families sacrifice so much for our country, and we have a responsibility to show our gratitude in every way we can. I hope we all will find ways to follow these Homefront Heroes' example this holiday season and in the coming year."

The 2008 Homefront Hero Award recipients include:

- **E. H. Sutherland Elementary School**, of Chicago, raised more than \$1,000 during National Veterans Awareness Week by selling wristbands inscribed with the messages of "pride," "honor," "freedom," and "spirit." The money was donated to Honor Flight Chicago, an organization that flies Chicagoland-area veterans to the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. free of charge. Sutherland's donation will cover the expenses for two veterans.
- **DeWitt County Homefront**, based in Clinton, is a grassroots effort by military parents to salute and aid DeWitt County residents currently serving in the Armed Forces overseas. The group has organized signs to be placed throughout Clinton stating a servicemember's name and "DeWitt County supports their troops." The parents have also sent numerous care packages and letters to Iraq and Afghanistan.
- **See Your Soldier**, organized by the University of Illinois Extension Office in Rockford, has given numerous families the opportunity to be face-to-face with their family member overseas. Available at 15 campuses throughout the state, Illinois military families can communicate with their loved one overseas via internet telephone, video conferencing and instant messaging free-of-charge. To participate, please visit SeeYourSoldier.uiuc.edu.
- **Operation Helmetliner**, founded by Linda and Bob Swinford of Dahlgren, sends scarves, helmetliners and neck warmers to those serving on the frontlines, and makes blankets and quilts for injured servicemembers in hospitals. Operation Helmetliner has sent nearly 70,000 pieces overseas! On average, the group sends 1,700 items abroad a month at no cost to servicemembers.
- **Noah McClaugherty**, of St. Joseph, did not want birthday gifts this year. On his 9th birthday, Noah started "Soccer Balls for Soldiers," collecting soccer balls and additional funds to send them to troops overseas for distribution to children in Iraq and Kosovo.

- **[The Soldiers Project-Chicago Branch](#)** provides free counseling and support to servicemembers to help fight Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Illinois troops returning home from abroad. The free service is also available for military families struggling with the cycle from the time a family member is deployed to the transition back to civilian life. For more information, please visit [TheSoldiersProject.org](#).
- **McCarthy Foundation**, of Chicago, gathered local wounded veterans this summer to participate in a unique art project. The group painted a seat that was then placed in Standard Bank Stadium in Crestwood, IL, home of the Windy City Thunderbolts. Cloaked in gold to honor the Gold Star families, the seat was covered with paint that had a number of special ingredients: sand from Iraq and Iwo Jima; wood from the deck of the USS Missouri; a bullet from Gettysburg; a rock from Pearl Harbor; and a piece of metal from the World Trade Center. On June 19, the seat was inducted into the stadium, and half of all ticket sales, more than \$5,000, was donated to Walter Reed Army Medical Center.
- **Joliet Junior Women's Club** raised \$1,300 at their 4th Annual Sing for the Soldiers event that included local musicians and the Rialto Children's Choir. The proceeds were then donated to Operation Homefront-Illinois.
- **Hanover Township Clerk's Office**, based in Bartlet, has organized the Operation Support Our Troops Marathon for four years, hosting more than 400 people last year. The day-long donation drive honors local veterans while aiding those currently serving overseas. Last year the event filled two trailers of donations, including tissues, batteries, socks and sunscreen! The Clerk's Office also manages the Hanover Veterans Honor Roll, which salutes each local veteran with a plaque on the township wall and his or her name in a leather-bound book and on the township website.
- **STRIPES**, run by New Life Community Church in Oak Forest, helps veterans transition back into civilian life. Founded by veteran Michael White, STRIPES - which stands for Surviving Trauma, Receiving Inner Peace, Enjoying Salvation - assists veterans by offering personal stress management plans, recovery programs, pastoral counseling, career resources, informational meetings, and medical references.
- **St. Gregory Episcopal Church**, of Deerfield, held its 22nd Annual Troop Care Package event this fall. Members of the church and surrounding community came together to send 125-150 packages to servicemembers overseas.
- **Volle's Bridal Boutique**, of Lake Zurich, was chosen as one of 18 bridal stores across the nation to participate in the Veterans Day Brides Across America wedding dress give-away. Dresses were given away to women who served on active duty in Iraq or Afghanistan or whose fiancés are currently on active duty. More than 1,000 dresses were given away nationwide.
- **Hinsdale Central High School Athlete's Committed to Excellence (ACE)**, a club sponsored by teacher Lauren Otahal and co-chaired by student Lauren Zumbach, hosted Trot for the Troops 5km run/walk and donated all \$5,000 in proceeds to Operation Homefront-Illinois. Leaders on and off the field, ACE is comprised of 150 Hinsdale Central athletes who are committed to living a drug-free lifestyle and making positive choices.
- **Mokena Park District** invited families and children to join together on Veterans Day for "Stockings for Our Troops." Still in its first year, the event generated more than 130 stockings made in less than two hours and then filled with toiletries and other necessities. Each stocking also included a hand-made card from community members thanking servicemembers for their dedication to our country.
- **Peoria Area Troop Support (P.A.T.S.)**, a small, grassroots organization of parents and community members, has sent more than 3,000 care packages overseas since its founding in 2003. This holiday season, the organization is sending \$20 dollar gift cards to be used at the Post Exchange (PX) on any base.
- **Ladies Aid**, of St. Paul Lutheran Church in Matteson, has mailed more than 10,000 items to troops overseas since its founding in June 2007! The women's group of 20 volunteers is connected with Lutheran chaplains overseas and sends the packages to them for distribution. The care packages include, soap, shampoo, deodorant, gum, trail mix, crossword puzzles and a letter of support.
- **The Retired Enlisted Association-Illinois Chapter**, of Waukegan, hosted the 2008 Fun4Funds Golf Fundraiser, raising \$1,600 for the Illinois Military Relief Fund. The Association seeks to enhance the quality of life of retired servicemembers and their families. In three years, they have donated more than \$6,100 to the Illinois Military Relief Fund, which provides financial assistance to Illinois National Guard members and reservists called to active duty in the Global War on Terror.
- **Bahney Foundation**, founded by Amanda Bahney of Casey, raises money to buy laptops and webcams for servicemembers who can't afford them, so they can stay connected with friends and family at home. Amanda's husband Eric was killed suddenly in a car accident, just prior to being deployed with the Illinois National Guard. She founded the Bahney Foundation to keep her husband's memory alive and continue her dedication to helping our

troops.

For more information, please visit: OperationHomefront.org.