

NEWS & INTEL

A National 501(c)3 with
No Paid Administrators
#45-0579363

operation**NEVER**forgotten.org



Volume 1, Issue 2 – November, 2014

ONF's history: Founded by Blue Star Mom

Linda Kelly, a Montana wildlife photographer with a weekend life-style of packing in the backcountry by horseback, was approached by her son on Valentine's Day, 2003.

"Mom," he said, "I'm joining the Marines."

A proud but anxious Blue Star mom with a son in combat, she saw a need for a better connection between our military and civilian worlds.

In 2005, Kelly's son returned home without 13 Marines from his unit.

Kelly went to a fundraiser in Madison, Wisc., for injured Marines and to pay tribute to the fallen heroes. Peg O'Donnell, mother of fallen Lance Corporal Shane O'Donnell stated, "We want recognition and remembrance."

This memorable statement drove Kelly to use her lifetime career in award-winning graphic design and photography to help Americans never forget those who have made sacrifices to defend us and our country.

Kelly immediately registered the domain, "Operation Never Forgotten." Since then, she has been volunteering full time for Operation Never Forgotten (ONF), doing administration, awareness campaigns, program development, creative production, marketing and public relations.

Since the launch, Peg O'Donnell has been with the ONF team as

(PSAs) to ONF.

One of her first billboards in 2005 was for the O'Donnell Gold Star family in Madison by Lamar. Eventually all other major outdoor advertising companies – including Clear Channel, CBS, Adams and others – began posting ONF's digital billboards.

ONF PSAs soon spread across the country for memorable days, including NYC Times Square during the Thanksgiving Day Parade.

Another Driving Force

It was time for ONF to grow.

After learning of Kelly's having a husband and son serving in Opera-

tion Iraqi Freedom John Kinzinger, Commander of VFW Post 423 in Ann Arbor, Mich., joined Kelly's passion and commitment to ONF in late 2007. In 2008, ONF received its national non-profit 501(c)3 status.

With Kinzinger as a driving force, ONF was able to raise funds for

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Linda Kelly's billboard for Shane O'Donnell.

an advisor and volunteers at ONF warrior events.

"Creative" Sold the Concept

Outdoor advertising companies with digital highway and inner-city billboards were impressed with Kelly's graphics and messages – and offered public service announcements



Fight It Together!

ONF Proactive With Past/Upcoming Program Stress Events

On average, about 22 *military veterans commit suicide across our nation daily*. Unimaginable.

For more than 25 years, I've been a very involved Vietnam Veteran working to help other veterans. Although not an expert, I know enough about PTS to help organize the Operation Never Forgotten Post Traumatic Stress Program.

Along with Mike Mills, Program Director, we strongly believe that Post Traumatic Stress should no longer be referred to as PTSD. It should not be referred to as a disorder.

Unlike the Wounded Warrior Project, ONF is a small, non-profit organization without paid employees. Nonetheless, we still reach out to do what we are able to do for as many as we can.

Reaching Out

After our two major Big Sky Montana events for almost 100 injured Post-911 warriors, we developed friendships with a solid core group of Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom, OIF) and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom, OEF) War Veterans.

Some have learned to handle their PTS and are good organizers, mentors and leaders. We have asked some to become Project Directors who will work with Mike Mills at various locations around the U.S.

We organized a pilot PTS weekend workshop in Portland, Ore., earlier this year. From our observations and attendee feedback, it was a definite success. (See our Spring ONF Newsletter.) We have taken our lessons learned from that workshop and are incorporating them in future workshops.

In September of 2013, ONF conducted a fundraiser at the Sidetrack Grill in Ypsilanti, Mich.

Linda French, the owner, gave us half the meal costs and the wait staff gave us all their tips. We had a live auction and received donations.

Stacey Mason (vocalist and violin player) and Gary Vancena (a Vietnam Veteran disc jockey) provided the live entertainment. The place rocked – and we raised \$15,000 to kick off our PTS Workshop Program.

Filling The Hole

We are currently planning a four-day workshop at Weber's Inn in Ann Arbor, Mich. We will invite 10-15 warriors who come through the local VA Medical Center and their caregivers to these events.

Success means possibly saving a marriage or a life, through suggestions and education by professional speakers, break-out events, associating with others going through similar situations and educating caregivers how they can best help their warrior.

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Workshop in Michigan

ONF sponsored a Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) workshop in Ann Arbor, Mich., at Weber's Inn from Nov. 6-9. Weber's management supported our weekend with great staff, meeting rooms, food and reduced rates – helping to lead to an extremely successful event.

A special thank you for the financial support – \$4,500, which covered much of the cost – from the Chrysler Foundation through the efforts of Dundee Engine Plant employees.

This event is part of a new ONF program to reach out and help post-911 warriors with PTS and to help educate their caregivers. Warriors being seen at the Ann Arbor VA Medical Center for PTS attended from across Michigan. These events increase warriors and caregiver support and

helps reduce warrior divorce and suicide.

Program Director Mike Mills and his wife Suki led us through the weekend. Mentors and advisors Don Behm, Erika Behm and Lloyd Lee were part of our on-site staff. We also thank those who provided the childcare support needed to care for the warriors' children during the workshop sessions.

Special presenters and group sessions led to wonderful breakthroughs for many of the 12 warriors and their caregivers. The feedback at the end of the weekend made it clear that we succeeded with our program goals. Their comments tell the story...

"Wow! What an experience! I came home with the tools needed to help



my warrior with the demons he faces. Friendships were formed, tales were told, tears were shed and the journey to healing began for many of the warriors and their caregivers. I am honored to be associated with this supportive, informative, compassionate and activist foundation."

"My hubby warrior was very reserved to come. He is a homebody. But, as the weekend evolved, he was completely comfortable and even expressed emotions I thought were buried. This weekend brought us closer together. We learned communication, no matter how small or large, is the key ingredient. We learned so many tools and came away with tons of new information and ideas that will help us move on and become stronger for ourselves and together as a couple."

A highlight was a private, guided tour of the Michigan Stadium. While warriors were at the Big House, caregivers attended a makeup beauty session put on by ONF volunteer Katie Carter at Weber's.

Our post-event evaluation indicated that a follow-up event was needed to reinforce what they learned and continue the progress from this first workshop weekend. We are currently planning it and will also build upon our experience from this ONF event for future events in other cities.

John Kinzinger, Vice President



Fight It Together! –

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The gaping hole in the VA treatment program for PTS is that they do little, if anything, to educate the caregiver on how to best help their warrior. That is what this program will do, which can supplement all that the VA is doing for the warrior.

A key to our program is that the Project Director will be a local source of support for the warriors and caregivers attending the retreat. This local person, who has walked in PTS shoes and is outside the VA

system, will be someone the warrior can call on for support.

ONF envisions six to eight PTS retreats each year. That would mean we would touch over 100 warriors and their caregivers annually. We would make a difference for many warriors and caregivers.

We believe our work – and that of our supporters – along with the money we put into these projects, changes the lives of many of those who sacrificed so much for all of us.

Let's "Fight It Together!"

John Kinzinger, Vice President

Freedom Sound Off Winner Has Great Time

Freedom Sound Off was a singing contest fundraiser by Operation Never Forgotten (ONF) conducted at various locations throughout America in 2013 to support our “real” American idols, post 9-11 wounded veterans.

Among other contest prizes, all contestants were registered in a drawing for a trip for two to Nashville. This top prize included airfare, two nights at the new and luxurious Omni Hotel, dinner with country legend Lee Greenwood and backstage passes for his performance at the Grand Ole Opry.

The Armstrong family of Montana were volunteers at the Freedom Sound Off event and won the drawing, which took place in February.

In addition to the other parts of the contest, winning meant playing at the Grand Ole Opry.

Mrs. Armstrong Comments

“Our trip to Nashville to meet Mr. Greenwood and see him perform was the most wonderful trip our family has ever taken! We are so grateful to Linda Kelly at Operation Never Forgotten and Mr. Greenwood for making this trip possible.

“Lunch with Mr. Greenwood and his family was delightful. It was so nice to meet his lovely wife, Kim, and their boys. What a nice family.

“We thoroughly enjoyed our time in Nashville. The Omni Hotel was AMAZING! So beautiful! Since the hotel was right downtown, we were able to take in downtown Nashville just by walking around.

“On Sunday night we took Max to a weekly jam session at the Station Inn, a popular music stage downtown. Max had the time of his life. The audience was very appreciative of the music and listened intently to all the songs.

Operation Never Forgotten

Bringing our Military and Civilian worlds together through healing, recognition and gratitude.

“Once we arrived at the Opry, we felt bigger than life. We were escorted backstage where Mr. Greenwood was waiting for us. He was so kind and generous – seriously one of the nicest people we have ever met. He took us all around introducing us to everyone he knew.

“Lee told the kids to bring their fiddles to the backstage area and be prepared to play. He invited Max

and Jurnee to play in his dressing room and they played a duet for country legend Whispering Bill Anderson! What a thrill that was!

“Lee toured us around backstage and made us feel right at home, which we did right away, although we were all still in a state of shock that we were actually backstage at the Opry!

“What a thrill for Max and Jurnee as performers to stand on the biggest stage in our country! The kids tried to take it all in by watching the performances, taking pictures, and getting pictures with the big stars backstage.

“As musicians, seeing energetic performances by the various stars helps them to become even better with the crowds and audiences they perform for.

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Lee Greenwood, Jurnee Armstrong and Max Armstrong are all smiles backstage at the Grand Ole Opry.

ONF –

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printed backlit airport signs to thank Troops flying home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Billboards continued to help preserve memories of Fallen Heroes, and awareness campaigns were produced for Wounded Veterans. ONF digital messages spread to subways, stores, malls and TV/radio broadcasts.

Celebrity History

Kelly approached iconic songwriter/singer Lee Greenwood (page 4), famous for his hit “God Bless the USA,” to become ONF’s Spokesman and he committed for seven years. She also had celebrities send personal video messages to Veterans during ONF events, including Tom Brokaw, Taylor Swift, J. R. Martinez, John Elway, Randy Couture, Dennis Miller, Ted Nugent and others.

Kelly then had the idea of requesting celebrity signature merchandise for fundraising auctions. From famous sports professionals to entertainers and actors, celebrities honored real American stars: our fallen heroes, injured warriors and their families.

From Campaigns to Retreats

Kelly’s vision grew beyond awareness campaigns. She knew that there would be something therapeutic about sharing her love of Montana.

In 2011, ONF offered a winter outdoor recreational retreat called Sports, Afield & Stream (S.A.S.) to 42 Veterans and their caregivers in Big Sky. In 2012, a summer S.A.S. retreat offered another 50 guest warriors lifetime experiences, comradeship, empowerment and hope for healing.

To Donate To ONF

Freedom is not free! ONF welcomes all product, professional service or monetary gift donations any time of year. EVERY cash donation, regardless of size, helps! ONF is a 100% volunteer organization with no paid administration or staff, so your entire gift goes to help our warriors!

Choose the Pay Pal button on the **operationneverforgotten.org** website, or mail a check or money order payable to “Operation Never Forgotten” to:

ONF
P.O. Box 132
Saline, MI 48176

ONF is a 501(c) 3 organization, EIN# 45-0579363. Please include your email and street address to receive a non-profit contribution receipt for your tax records. (With your email address we can send you future ONF Newsletters.)

Please email johnalva@aol.com with any questions regarding the non-profit status and contribution receipts.

Thank you in advance for joining our efforts!



At each retreat big-game hunts, fishing trips, wilderness adventures, hot air ballooning and cattle ranch vacations were given away to Veterans and their families.

The S.A.S. retreats supported Veterans – and Veterans supported more ONF events! This snowball effect led ONF to start up smaller hometown workshops for Veterans wanting to get a better grip on their lives after war – to get ahead of healing.

These post-deployment-stress workshops are called A-Head of Healing. Sergeant First Class (Retired) Mike Mills joined the ONF team as Program Director and his wife Suki, as a Family Supporter. ONF continues to reach out to local communities bringing health care professionals, family supporters and Veterans to other Veterans with post-deployment stress.

Suicide Prevention Awareness

The ONF team realized that the more workshops and retreats offered, the more they could help prevent Veteran suicide.

The ONF team started fundraisers and powerful campaigns to help fight the painful statistic of 22 Veteran suicides per day. Katie Carter joined ONF as the Suicide Prevention Awareness Director. She is a family survivor of her late fiancé, 1st Lieutenant Matthew Szymanski.

The Mission Continues

After being started by a Blue Star Mom and inspired by a Gold Star Mom in 2005, ONF’s dedicated team of Veterans, military family members, professionals and other volunteers continue to give back!

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Jurnee –

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“We were all especially inspired by Mr. Greenwood, who is so generous with his time and talent in the many ways he supports our military heroes. He is so sincere in his efforts, and that was a great example for us all.”

Jurnee Comments

“I can’t believe I actually won this trip! The whole experience was amazing! I took so many pictures, even on the plane! I think we all had a great time... we seemed to be laughing about everything!

“Mr. Greenwood was an amazing person! I don’t think I have ever met a nicer man! He was so involved in everything, always helping us and

**Watch for the
new ONF
website in 2015!**



Linda Kelly

ONF –

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Still today, ONF is proud of having no paid administration (see above) so that more donations received can go to the cause.

“Knowing the selfless hard work of our defenders keeps the selfless hard work going for ONF,” Kelly said. “Veterans continue to inspire us all!”



ONF 2013 Finances **(based on submitted IRS 2013 990-EZ)**

Utilities	\$2,845
Printing, postage and shipping	\$994
Other expenses*	<u>\$6,240</u>
Total expenses	\$10,079

* Includes Rehab Warrior Trips, Contest Winner Trip, office supplies, advertising materials, etc.

Notes: No officers or directors receive pay.
Our 2013 IRS Form is available upon request.

See page 5 to donate to ONF.

answering all our many questions that we had for him!

“Backstage at the Grand Ole Opry with Mr. Greenwood was the time of my life! It was so cool to see the performers performing live and to have my picture taken with them!

“I wish I could rewind and do the entire trip over again! I can’t imagine that any other trip could ever

be as amazing as this trip was! I’ll never forget it!”

Max Comments

“As a musician, I was in utter amazement of how spectacular the Grand Ole Opry was. Having the opportunity to meet Mr. Greenwood in person was very exciting for me.

“Meeting the other performers at the Opry like Ricky Skaggs, Josh Turner, Darryl Worley, John Conlee, and Bill Anderson inspired me to become a better musician and performer myself.”

“No other trip could have inspired me this much, and I truly had the time of my life.”



**Billboards
shown in this
Newsletter were
produced by
Linda Kelly**