MISSION

The Armed Services YMCA enhances the lives of military members and their families in spirit, mind and body through programs relevant to the unique challenges of military life.

VALUES STATEMENT

THE ARMED SERVICE YMCA WILL BE:
1. Guided by Christian principles
2. Use a holistic approach to develop programs that promote healthy spirit, mind and body
3. Focus our work in three areas: youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility
4. Be inclusive and treat everyone with compassion and respect
5. Give priority to junior enlisted and their families
6. Collaborate with military commands and community organizations
7. Honor the service members’ and their families’ commitment to defend our Nation
8. Strive for excellence in all we do

Making Military Life Easier
Our Donors Would Be Proud

“2016 was a great year, and looking forward there is more opportunity to support our military family.”

The Armed Services YMCA creates opportunities for military families to thrive. The challenges our military families face are unique and, at times, immense. Their world can be shattered in an instant. Our mission is to lessen their burden by providing real world programs and services that strengthen their ability to conquer the everyday challenges of military life.

Every donation furthers that goal. I am proud that we achieved a 4-star rating from Charity Navigator again this year. It shows that we are serious about operating efficiently and delivering quality support to our troops.

Every dollar contributed delivers a program, service, or event directly designed to increase the resiliency of our military family. We focus on the junior enlisted members because they have the fewest resources, smallest support networks, and the least life experience. In many cases, they have the responsibility of supporting a family.

Being able to serve this generation of young men and women is an honor. Being around them inspires me every day. There is no better feeling than to know you have made a difference in the lives of these selfless patriots. I know all of our donors feel the same way. It is fulfilling, and satisfying, to help.

At the ASYMCA, we talk about how there are no closed doors for our families. We might not be the best resource available for every challenge, so we are committed to opening the right door that leads them to a solution that fits their needs. To accomplish this, we work closely with other non-profits and military leaders. We have to be aware of what talents are out there and make those connections. We are happy to have so many partners helping us deliver even better service to our families.

We can show our gratitude to those military families who serve our nation by delivering quality support. We owe it to the families we serve and we owe it to our donors, without whom none of this would be possible. We cannot begin to provide the needed support to our military families without your contributions. If you gave last year, thank you for your continued commitment. With your help, we can support more families and ease the challenges of military life for those who protect our freedoms.

If you are interested in supporting the oldest military support organization in the United States to help our military families thrive, I look forward to hearing from you.

-- Lee Baxter, MG, USA (Ret)
The proud heritage of YMCA service in the military setting usually is associated with the year 1861, when dedicated YMCA volunteers took to the battlefields of the Civil War alongside America’s uniformed young men. It was the year that Abraham Lincoln commended YMCA leaders for their “benevolent undertaking for the benefit of the soldiers.”

The YMCA’s broader volunteer service to the Armed Forces, however, is tied to the Armed Services YMCA’s history. In April of 1861, a handful of YMCA members sought voluntarily to provide helpful services - by whatever means they could - to men in uniform. This initial group of YMCA volunteers aided the soldiers in nearby encampments, where they were stationed temporarily on their way to the front. Later, growing numbers of volunteers accompanied them to the battlefields.

Later that year representatives of 15 YMCAs came together to coordinate the YMCA’s overall efforts to alleviate the suffering of the sick and wounded. The organization created by that meeting was called The United States Christian Commission, whose initial purpose was to provide spiritual and physical comfort to soldiers. President Lincoln wrote to YMCA leaders, “I sincerely hope your plan may be as successful in execution, as it is just and generous in conception.”

“I SINCERELY HOPE YOUR PLAN MAY BE AS SUCCESSFUL IN EXECUTION, AS IT IS JUST AND GENEROUS IN CONCEPTION.”

-- ABRAHAM LINCOLN
Rumph has deep Y experience and is the new executive director of the Armed Services YMCA of Missouri at Fort Leonard Wood.

Mayes, a successful local business woman and fixture in the community is the new executive director at Armed Services YMCA Altus.

Foxen brings a depth of Y experience and came to the ASYMCA in 2016. She is the executive director at Armed Services YMCA Fort Bragg.

Riffer joined the team in early 2017 and brings a deep Y background. She is the new executive director at Armed Services YMCA Alaska.

Herrick joined the team in late 2016 after working at Operation Homefront for nearly a decade. She is the new executive director at Armed Services YMCA Lawton Fort Sill.
The Armed Services YMCA received a four-star rating from Charity Navigator and was named as a Top-Rated Military Charity by Charity Watch for its financial stewardship. These designations recognize the Armed Services YMCA for consistently executing its mission to enrich the lives of junior enlisted personnel and their families in a fiscally responsible way.

“We are proud to announce Armed Services YMCA has earned our second consecutive 4-star rating. This is our highest possible rating and indicates that your organization adheres to sector best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way,” said Michael Thatcher, President and CEO, Charity Navigator. “Attaining a 4-star rating verifies that Armed Services YMCA exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in your area of work.”

As America’s premier independent charity evaluator, Charity Navigator reviews the financial health of more than 5,500 of America’s largest charities, providing donors with objective, reliable assessments of the financial health of their chosen charity. The four-star rating indicates that Armed Services YMCA goes beyond industry standards.

“We work very hard to keep our expenses down, to keep as much money flowing to programs as possible.”

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY
much money flowing to programs that support as many of our junior enlisted and families as possible,” said William French, Armed Services YMCA President and CEO. “The fact that our efforts are acknowledged by Charity Navigator, CharityWatch and the Independent Charities of America validates that we are acting responsibly.”

CharityWatch analysts perform in-depth evaluations of complex charity financial reporting, including audited financial statements, tax forms, annual reports, state filings, and other documents. Once complete, and any required adjustments are made, a charity is assigned a letter grade efficiency rating on an A+ to F scale. ASYMCA was assigned an A.

In addition to Charity Navigator and CharityWatch, the Armed Services YMCA is a proud recipient of the Independent Charities Seal of Excellence, which is awarded to the members of Independent Charities of America and Local Independent Charities of America that have, upon rigorous independent review, been able to certify, document, and demonstrate on an annual basis that they meet the highest standards of public accountability, program effectiveness, and cost effectiveness.

These standards include those required by the U.S. Government for inclusion in the Combined Federal Campaign, arguably the most exclusive fund drive in the world. According to the Independent Charities of America, of the 1,000,000 charities operating in the United States today, it is estimated that fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet or exceed these standards, and, of those, fewer than 2,000 have been awarded this Seal.

November proclaimed Military Family Month

Military Family Month was first celebrated in 1993. The following year, President Clinton issued a presidential proclamation establishing National Military Families Recognition Day. Subsequent presidents have issued proclamations, and Congress has periodically passed resolutions designating November as Military Family Month.

Each year in November, communities around the world observe Military Family Month. It is a time to celebrate the contributions of military families and convey to them respect and appreciation for the sacrifices they make to support their service members.

“For generations, brave Americans have stepped forward and answered our country’s call to serve in our Armed Forces. With honor and distinction, our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen fight to defend the principles upon which our Republic was founded so that we might live in a freer and more prosperous world,” reads the proclamation signed by President Barack Obama, 27 October 2016.

It continues, “Behind these courageous Americans stand spouses, children, and parents who give up precious time with their loved ones, bearing the burden of long deployments and difficult moves, and oftentimes putting their careers on hold. During Military Family Month, we salute the families of those who proudly are a part of our Nation’s unbroken chain of patriots for their unwavering devotion, and we renew our sacred vow to uphold our promise to our troops, our veterans, and their families.”

Community leaders, businesses, military bases, and posts team up each year to recognize military families through special events such as: open houses, fun runs, family fun nights, and community dinners. Discounts by local business, sporting events or providing special recognitions during community activities throughout the month of November are great ways to show support.
PenFed Credit Union donates $75K

PenFed Credit Union donated $75,000 to the Armed Services YMCA supporting efforts to make military life easier. PenFed’s donation will be used to support junior enlisted members of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard, and their families.

American Airlines supports ASYMCA with 4 million miles

American Airlines donated 4 million air miles to help the Armed Services YMCA support active duty service members and their families.

American Airlines has long been a supporter of the military and their families. This is a continuation of their long-term commitment.

The Armed Services YMCA is proud to be connected to American Airlines and their employees who so generously give back to the men and women who defend our nation.

G6 / Motel 6 makes donation to provide families the “Christmas You Missed”

The Armed Services YMCA Twentynine Palms hosted its first Christmas You Missed event June 25, 2016 aboard the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center, Twentynine Palms, Calif. The event is designed to recreate Christmas day for the families who had a loved one deployed during Christmas 2015.

Motel 6 and their employees participated in the event and provided a donation to ensure success. Tiffany Ferguson, an Armed Services YMCA volunteer, played the part of Mrs. Claus for the day.

Piedad Martinez, Julian Padilla, Santa, Dawn Clark, and Matt Smith-Rinehart.

G6 Hospitality gifts school supplies

G6 Hospitality donates a trailer load of school supplies to ASYMCA Killeen.

Employees donated school supplies and raised money to help out with the purchasing of additional school supplies for families in need.

The ASYMCA is truly grateful for such a great partner!
ABC’s Bob Woodruff films at Hampton Roads

Woodruff, who was critically injured while covering the War in Iraq in 2006, was saved by the advances in military medical care. As host and correspondent of the special, he brings his personal understanding of the issues.

Much of the visit was recorded for possible use in Military Medicine: Beyond the Battlefield, a one-hour documentary from NJTV for WNET. The documentary seeks to tell the stories of the men and women at the forefront of new medical frontiers.

The documentary will showcase doctors and surgeons treating returning survivors. It will offer eyewitness accounts as they come home to resume their lives, and recover from often critical injuries. The program airs nationwide and is part of Veterans Coming Home, a nationwide public media project helping to bridge the military-civilian divide.

Auctioned Jack Daniel’s Indian Chief Vintage Motorcycle raises $150,000 in support of Operation Ride Home

A highly collectible Jack Daniel’s Indian Chief Vintage motorcycle was auctioned last October at the Barrett-Jackson Las Vegas Auction for $150,000, with all proceeds going to Jack Daniel’s “Operation Ride Home” program that assists service members and their families travel from base to home during the holidays.

The bike sold was #1 of 150 individually numbered motorcycles – the first-ever production vehicles to feature the Jack Daniel’s livery – in honor of the distillery’s 150th anniversary. The extremely rare commemorative production run of the Limited Edition Jack Daniel’s Indian Springfield™ and Indian Chief Vintage motorcycle models sold the remaining units in just one day.

The #1 bike was the last available and arguably the most valuable.

“This motorcycle is so special not only because it’s #1 from this rare production run, but also because all of the proceeds from its sale will go to help our heroes and their families make it from their base to home this holiday season,” said Jeff Arnett, Jack Daniel’s Master Distiller. “All of us at the distillery honor our military men and women, and we’re so proud to join with our friends at the Armed Services YMCA, Indian Motorcycle and Klock Werks in this effort to give back to those who have given so much.”

Since Operation Ride Home began six years ago, 2,083 junior enlisted single service members and those with families – a total of 5,767 people – have travelled from their bases to homes around the country for the holidays. Through the ASYMCA and military commands, service members and families are identified who most need financial assistance for travel and are provided airplane tickets or pre-paid debit cards for gas and lodging for those families who are driving. In addition to Jack Daniel’s annual $100,000 contribution, friends are asked to visit www.jdoperationridehome.com to do what they can to help out.
David C. Copley Foundation makes $75K contribution

The David C. Copley Foundation granted $75,000 to ASYMCA Camp Pendleton to support the Fisher Children’s Center.

The foundation focuses on community, culture and arts, education, medical and health, and youth development, which continue the Copley family legacy of supporting life, enriching organizations and fostering community and civic improvement.

Partnering with the Camp Pendleton branch since 2014, the David C. Copley Foundation has supported special Holiday Programs, the popular Preschool Program and most recently the Fisher Children’s Center, offering affordable hourly child care on base, the only center in the Marine Corps. These funds will assist the ASYMCA in continuing to help make military life easier for our Marines, Sailors and their families.

Krysten Fleming, Grant Writer, and Chris Keane, Executive Director of ASYMCA Camp Pendleton proudly display the generous donation from the David C. Copley Foundation.

Hawaiian Electric Companies Present $12K grant for Early Readiness Program

Students attending the ASYMCA Lawton Fort Sill Child Care Center performed Christmas carols for a packed house the evening of Dec. 13.

The crowd of more than 200, made up of parents, siblings, and grandparents, were treated to Christmas music by students from each class.

Santa arrived at the end of the musical portion of the program. He spent a few minutes reciting “Twas the Night Before Christmas” to the glee of the children and then handed out presents to each child.

Every child was able to have their picture taken with him.

Santa visits with Natania after she finished performing on stage.

The Armed Services YMCA is grateful for community partners like Hawaiian Electric Companies who invest in the early learning readiness of local military children. Your support helps us make military life easier!

From L to R: Ron Cox, Hawaiian Electric, VP Power Supply; Laurie Moore, Executive Director, ASYMCA Honolulu; Chelsey Kline, Early Learning Readiness Facilitator, ASYMCA

Landon Romero joins other children in thanking Hawaiian Electric Companies for their generous grant of $12,000 in support of the Early Learning Readiness Program on Aliamanu Military Reservation.
USS Midway Foundation donates $30K

ASYMCA Camp Pendleton, San Diego share gift

The USS Midway Museum Foundation recently awarded the Camp Pendleton and San Diego Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA) with a grant check of $15,000 each to be put towards vital programs in support of our Marines, Sailors and their families in San Diego.

(L to R) Dan Beintema, President, USS Midway Museum Foundation, Tim Ney, Executive Director, Armed Services YMCA San Diego, Chris Keane, Executive Director Armed Services YMCA Camp Pendleton, and John Hawkins, Chairman Board of Directors, USS Midway Museum Foundation.

Woman’s Day recognized for decades of support

The dedicated effort of the Woman’s Day staff and generosity of the Woman’s Day readership have contributed $1.687 million dollars since the partnership began 11 years ago. The donations have funded the ASYMCA’s Operation Holiday Joy program that provides young military families with food baskets and toys for military children during the holidays.

William French, Vice Adm, USN (Ret.), President | CEO of the Armed Services YMCA presents Hendley Badcock, Editorial Assistant, Woman’s Day, and Susan Spencer, Editor-in-Chief, Woman’s Day, with a token of appreciation for supporting the men, women, and families of the military since 2005.

ASYMCA Fort Leonard Wood moves back on post

To better serve the soldiers and families of Fort Leonard Wood, the Armed Services YMCA branch there has moved its operations back on post. Thanks to the leadership on post, the new location will allow all current programs to continue and will allow additional programs to begin. Located in building 493 on Replacement Ave., the new facility is now up and running. The Fort Leonard Wood community is invited to stop by and see the new space.
GEICO presents ASYMCA $50K check at Redskins game

GEICO continues to show support for military

GEICO continues to have a strong relationship with the ASYMCA, not only as the main sponsor of the Art and Essay Contest, but as a contributor to the leadership of the ASYMCA. Jon Thompson served as a National Board member for the ASYMCA; his leadership was reflected in our mission and in GEICO’s continued support to military personnel across the country.

John Underwood and Jon Thompson, from GEICO Military, present a check for $50K to Chris Haley and William French from the ASYMCA National Headquarters on the field during halftime of a preseason Washington Redskins NFL Football game.

ASYMCA El Paso delivers Turkeys & Thanksgiving baskets to Fort Bliss families for 20th year

For the past 20 years Armed Services YMCA El Paso has conducted the annual turkey and Thanksgiving food basket giveaway. Fort Bliss military units voluntarily collect donations of non-perishable foods for Soldiers and Military Families in need to help run this program. The annual food giveaway is organized by the ASYMCA El Paso. The event costs about $35,000, and the entire program is supported with donated money and food from individuals, businesses, organizations, churches and schools. The giveaway benefits junior enlisted soldiers -- primarily sergeants and below -- who have families and some National Guard and Reserve members. Recipients were selected by their units based on need and family size.

“I feel the generosity every time I come here,” said Lauren Perez, who received a turkey. “They make me feel like I’m part of the family.”

“We want to tell our soldiers how much we appreciate their sacrifices and the sacrifices made by their families,” said Joe Pritchard, Executive Director, ASYMCA El Paso.

Volunteers from across El Paso and Fort Bliss sort food into bags for military families.
Armed Services YMCA (ASYMCA) of Honolulu has provided for military personnel and their families since 1917. Now in our 100th year in Hawaii, we are proud to have served the military longer, and in larger numbers, than any other nonprofit. As we’ve done so, we have progressed with the times; our historic dance band competitions have become Father Daughter Dances, our WWII letter writing service has been replaced by Parent Participation Preschool, and our game rooms have evolved into robotics camps. All the while we’ve remained on the scene, providing programs and services relevant to the demands of military life.

As we celebrate our 100th year in Hawaii, we recognize it is the community that has generously sustained the work of ASYMCA and has helped strengthen literally generations within our military ‘ohana. Mahalo nui loa for the vital role you continue to play in helping “making military life easier”.

We are both humbled and privileged to support the brave men and women who serve our country. At ASYMCA of Honolulu, we have both a history and a future, and because of the community’s support, we can look with pride and certainty in both directions.

USAA, ASYMCA unite to build military family resiliency

Military life can be challenging for families. Through an alliance with ASYMCA’s clinical counseling program, USAA Bank helped 400 families receive the care and support they needed. In addition, USAA Bank helped honor and recognize military medics at the 10th Annual Angels of the Battlefield Awards Gala who have helped save or protect lives.

Harriet Dominique, Senior Vice President, Corporate Responsibility and Community Affairs, USAA, speaks at the 10th Annual ASYMCA Angels of the Battlefield Awards Gala, Nov. 4, 2016.
The 10th Annual Angels of the Battlefield Awards Gala was held Nov. 4 at the Ritz Carlton Hotel in Pentagon City.

Gen. Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was the keynote speaker. He personally recognized this year’s honorees; Army: SFC Daniel Lopez-Bonaglia, Marine Corps: PO2 Nicholas Otazo, Navy: Seaman Elgie McCoy, Air Force: TSGT Cody Inman, USAF, and Coast Guard: HS2 Ryan Ransom.

The Armed Services YMCA works with the military services to select a single honoree serving as a medic, corpsmen, or pararescuemen from each service. The Angels of the Battlefield Awards Gala recognizes those men and women who are on the front lines saving lives and demonstrating extraordinary courage.

These “Angels” administer lifesaving medical treatment and trauma care in the line of duty.
They are compassionate men and women who risk everything and are often the reason why so many of our nation’s heroes wounded in battle have made it home to their families and communities. Angels is the only event which recognizes

the frontline actions of military medical personnel.

This year’s presenting sponsors were MARCOA Media and USAA. Their contributions support not just the Angels Gala, but programming provided by the ASYMCA to military families across the country. John Kirby, Rear Adm., USN, (Ret), Assistant Secretary of State was the Master of Ceremonies.

A new addition this year was the Angel of Honor Award, presented to a member of the community that has shown exceptional dedication and commitment to supporting the military family.

This year’s award was presented to Lee Greenwood for his lifetime of support. Greenwood was unable to attend and provided a video acceptance.

Cammo Kids, an all military dependent singing group, brought the house down with their rendition of the service medley.

The Cammo Kids, made up of military children, received a standing ovation for their version of the service medley.

Artist donates Angel of Honor

The Angel of Honor Award was sculpted by nationally acclaimed artist, Gareth Curtiss.

We are honored that he would donate his extraordinary talent to create this award. He also cast the 8 pound bronze statue at his foundry in Montana.

The Angel of Honor Award is the highest award the Armed Services YMCA can confer, and is presented to an individual or organization demonstrating distinguished and extraordinary advancement of the ASYMCA mission.

Gareth Curtiss, at his foundry, casting the statue, which is pictured below.
FILLING GAPS
ADDING VALUE

“Part of our strength is our ability to customize programs for different locations based on command needs.”

Across our branches, we offer both core and locally created programming. In all cases, the programs are tailored to fit the specific needs of the community being supported. Our ability to adapt, adjust, and apply national level learning is part of our strength.

Learning what a commander needs to support the troops and building a delivery model is what we have been doing since the Civil War.

ASYMCA programs include:

Annual Art and Essay Contest
The annual Armed Services YMCA Art & Essay Contest allows children to express their love, appreciation and admiration for their military heroes and serves to remind us of the sacrifices our men and women in uniform, and their families, make each day for our country. Entries for the art contest depict the theme, “My Military Family.”

The contest is officially launched in November and is open to all eligible children of U.S. active duty or retired service members.

Winners of both the art and essay contests have their winning entries displayed at each ASYMCA branch and affiliate location, as well as military bases worldwide during Military Family Month each November. Winners also receive special Apple brand product prizes to help military children create and express themselves.

Spring 2018 Graduation
White Oaks Elementary
Military Family Month
Military Family Month was established in 1996 by the Armed Services YMCA, with the U.S. Government recognizing the occasion every year since. Each November, The Armed Services YMCA celebrates Military Family Month to demonstrate the nation’s support and commitment to the families of military personnel. With hundreds of thousands of service members deployed, recognizing the daily sacrifices made by military families has never been more important.

Tailored Programs Focused on Junior Enlisted and Their Families

Parent and Me
The ASYMCA’s Parent & Me education program provides a much-needed platform to help support and build confidence in parents in their roles as their child’s first teacher. The program guides and gives tools to parents on how to enhance the developmental areas of the child and offers an opportunity for early learning and bonding. The classes provide a variety of activities which enhance cognitive, emotional, social, motor and other skills of children generally reaching children ages 2-5 years old.

Forced frequent moves due to military orders is one of the unique stressors of military family life. These moves can come without warning and without control over future location. The move often causes economic hardships and feelings of isolation. Coupled with a short-fused deployment by the active duty spouse and it can result in a spouse and children left behind without the support of their own family or any type of established local network to rely upon. This can lead to depression, poor financial decisions, and marital discord. Many of the spouses are young, often new parents, away from support groups of their home community.

This class provides the setting for both parents and children to make new friendships and feel part of a community, which, is often missing in the lives of military families.

Operation Outdoors
Operation Outdoors provides junior enlisted families the chance to participate in family, youth and teen year-round outdoor programs. The unique atmosphere provides an opportunity for military kids to meet, have fun and build a support network. Outdoor
experiences (resident/day camps, field trips, Kids Olympics, fishing trips, swimming, campfires, hiking), away from the military environment provides stability to military families dealing with stressful deployments and other difficulties associated with military life.

**Operation Kid Comfort**
Volunteers at the Armed Services YMCA create custom-made photo transfer quilts and pillows to help with the separation of deployment. Each child receives a free quilt or pillow; children 7 and under receive a quilt, 8 and older receive a pillow. Operation Kid Comfort quilts and pillows are for the children of our deployed active duty U.S. military service men and women.

**Operation Ride Home**
The Jack Daniels and the Armed Services YMCA Operation Ride Home program helps to bring military families together for the holidays. Operation Ride Home sponsors travel for eligible service members and their dependents to travel home for the holidays. Reconnecting military families during this special time of year is one small way Operation Ride Home is making military life easier.

**Teddy’s Child Watch**
Teddy’s Child Watch removes a barrier to health care. The financial duress of child care adds to military families missing doctors’ appointments.

When families have the ability to drop off their children inside the hospital at no cost, they are more likely to attend scheduled appointments. Siblings kept out of clinic areas have reduced exposure to other sick patients.

In locations where Teddy’s Child Watch exists, hospital administrators report a 30% drop in no show rates. The result of Teddy’s Child Watch is that more military family members are receiving the needed medical care, improving the overall health and resiliency of our military families.

**Military Outreach Initiative**
The Military Outreach Initiative provides eligible military families and active duty personnel access to youth development, healthy living, and social responsibility programs through no-cost memberships at local community YMCAs, or fitness clubs funded by the Department of Defense and managed by the ASYMCA.
Operation Hero: driving success

Thanks to a grant from the JCPenney Foundation, we were able to bring our Operation Hero afterschool program to more military children across the country last year.

The JCPenney Foundation is a 501(c)3 public charity that partners with organizations to provide underserved kids clothing, youth programming opportunities and career readiness.

Operation Hero is an after school program designed to help school age (ages 6 to 12) military children improve academically and socially. The challenges of military life can be especially hard on children who are forced to leave friends behind and start over at a new school due to a new set of military orders. They often feel disenfranchised within their own family and respond poorly to the instability caused by frequent moves, family disruption due to deployments, increased parental stress, and direct and indirect trauma associated with the wounds of war.

Referred by teachers, parents or school officials, the program provides after school and mentoring assistance in small groups with certified teachers. This early intervention program runs for three quarterly after school sessions across the school year and can extend into a summer session. Operation Hero facilitates a positive environment, encourages responsible behavior and gets children back on track in school and life.

As a general philosophy, the ASYMCA works closely with military installation commanders to identify gaps in social services, then tailors programming to meet the specific needs of military troops and their families in the communities ASYMCA serves. One of the greatest needs military installation Commanding Officers consistently identify is the need for programs designed to help military children adjust to the unique challenges associated with military life and loss of life.

Children between ages 6-12 years bear a tremendous amount of stress related to frequent moves, parental deployment, and trauma resulting from the wounding or loss of a mother or father. Every parent that deploys in support of our country’s defense is different upon his or her return. Operation Hero provides a safe, after school environment where these children can express their emotions, receive academic and emotional support, and connect with peers who are experiencing the same challenges. School officials, teachers, or parents refer children to the program when they notice a child who is socially struggling or who is beginning to show a decline in school performance.

“Before Operation Hero I spent most of my time in front of a screen. Now I don’t want to… I want to play outside.”

-- Mackenzie
The annual ASYMCA Art and Essay Contest allows children to express their love, appreciation and admiration for their military heroes. Their essays and artwork also serve to remind us of the sacrifices our men and women in uniform, and their families, make each day for our country.

We received many creative, artistic and beautiful entries for this year’s contest, making judging more difficult than ever! Thank you to everyone who submitted an essay or artwork. Your dedication to your military families and heroes deserves to be recognized and celebrated. We are proud of your work and even more proud of your contributions to our military community.

A special thank you to Art and Essay Contest sponsor, GEICO, and to everyone who supported this year’s contest. We appreciate all those who helped spread the word about this contest at schools and in your communities. We hope to continue encouraging creative expression through writing and art.

My Military Hero
By Kelsey Mashburn
Winner for the 7-8 Grade Category

Other than my dad, my military hero is without a doubt Noah Galloway. Noah is a former United States Soldier. He was injured during the Iraq War. He lost his left arm, above the elbow, and his left leg, above the knee. He was severely injured in an IED attack. All of these injuries didn’t stop him. Instead of losing hope and thinking that his whole world was over, he still thought of helping other people.

He became a motivational speaker. He talks to veterans, children, and others. He gives them his message of having “no excuses.” I learned about Noah when he was chosen as a contestant on Dancing with the Stars. He danced his way gracefully to third place. He taught me that, no matter what, if I put my mind and heart to something, I could do it. Noah also makes me realize how lucky I am.

Whenever my dad gets deployed it is always very scary. I feel very grateful and blessed when he comes back safe and unharmed. There are many other kids that aren’t as fortunate as me. Some dads and moms never come back home. Others might not even remember their own kids or might be severely injured. It breaks my heart for the other kids that have to live through that. Noah founded a charity called No Excuses Charitable Fund. Noah Galloway is one great example of perseverance. He inspires me to never give up and to believe in myself.

My Military Hero
By Sadie Hawkins
Winner for the 3-4 Grade Category

As sadness flows through me, the days grow longer. I think of him more and more and my love grows stronger. I still think of the memories we had together in my mind. Still wishing your heart was still pure and kind. Please take my calls, please pick up the phone. In this big world I feel so alone. Please come back to me in this world or another, but just remember I will love you forever.

Please don’t forget me, I love you too much. Our love is stronger when our hands touch. Remember me, as I will remember you.

My Military Hero
Ava Beckett, Age 9
Coast Guard: >>

Keira Reigle, Age 10
Winning artwork:
<>< Army: >>
<< Coast Guard: >>

away at a moment’s notice. This is something that lingers at the back of the mind of many. The older children often seem like they lose part of their childhood in order to help the parent who is still home with them currently. During times of deployment, training, and other military related leave causes brings a strain to those who are still home. They have to deal with everyday life as well as worrying about what their family members who are not able to be with them at the moment. There are many unknown heroes in every community. They will come in every type with a combination of variables, but there are often those who are the unseen who support the ones who are the clear heroes.

My Military Hero
By Sarah Johnson
Winner for the 9–10 Grade Category

The young girl nervously straightened her costume. Her mother had reassured her thousands of times that she would do just fine, but she still felt butterflies rising in her stomach. Her sole prop, a heavy duffle bag, almost as big as she was, sagged on the floor nearby. She wondered how her dad could lug that thing around all the time. Even when it was empty, her small arms could barely lift it. She wished her dad was there. She remembered him coming to her kindergarten class a few months earlier, back for only a week before he had to leave again. She'd showed him the special yellow ribbons on the school wall, one for each soldier gone to Iraq and Afghanistan. “When I grow up,” she proclaimed, “I’m going to fight for America to!” He laughed and scooped her up, he hesitated, “By the time you grow up, I hope you won’t have to.”

While daddy was home, the whole family had laughed, cried and talked together. But then Daddy had to go back, and the girl was left only letters and pictures, mere reflections of her Father’s hugs and laughs. She consoled herself with family albums, photographs from before she was even born of exotic sounding places like Heidelberg, South Korea and Arizona. Letters came quite frequently, containing more pictures, jokes and snippets of information about life in the barracks of Baghdad. She didn't care much about “Operation Iraqi Freedom” or “Saddam Hussain.” The jokes were far more interesting. Only later would she understand why he wrote so often, and why her mom read and reread his letters until the worn paper fell apart in tatters. Until then, she would be content to play long distance tic-tac-toe and laugh at the pictures he sent.

Whenever the girl asked what her dad was doing, all her mother would say was, “He’s fighting bad guys to keep us safe.” Her dad grew in her mind to be a superhero, like in the movies, and she viewed him with corresponding adoration.

Her teacher’s voice called her back to the present. It was her turn to go on. She stepped forward from the line of her fellow students and muttered through her lines with all the grace that a five year old could muster, “When I grow up… I will be a soldier, strong and brave and true! I fight to keep our country safe, for me and for you!” She stepped back into line, allowing the next child to come forward. She smiled and sent a small wave to her mom, proudly thinking to herself, “I’m going to be just like my dad!”

My Military Hero
By Jennifer Moorman
Winner 11–12 Grade Category

What defines a hero is each person's opinion even though there is a definition for it. To me a hero is those who have served in the many branches of the United States Armed forces, but that is not who I am writing this essay about. The main military heroes I look to are often overlooked and can easily blend into a crowd. They are the people who stay home while a family member is sent away from them.

Military families are some of the strongest people there are. They have to support not only the member of the family who is away, but also each other during times when someone is missing from the household. Many times they will have to deal with long times apart and the missing of special events, birthdays, and important family holidays.

Time is something that we only have a certain amount of. It does not make it easy for anyone to miss one moment with their child(ren). Many parents have missed little milestones in the lives of their child(ren), events that they will never be able to witness. Precious minutes are often thrown away by people no matter who they are. It is not until the end of their lives that they start to realize just what they have missed.

With military families they know very well the value of time when their loved one is there to not witness events that most parents or other families would be able to see on a daily basis. Along with the drama of school the children of military parents often have to deal with the fact that one of their parents might be called away at a moment’s notice. This is something that lingers at the back of the mind of many. The older children often seem like they lose part of their childhood in order to help the parent who is still home with them currently.

During times of deployment, training, and other military related leave causes brings a strain to those who are still home. They have to deal with everyday life as well as worrying about what their family members who are not able to be with them at the moment. There are many unknown heroes in every community. They will come in every type with a combination of variables, but there are often those who are the unseen who support the ones who are the clear heroes.
“My Military Hero”  
By Elva Alvarez  
Winner 5–6 Grade Category  
My military hero is my Dad. I want to introduce you to a very special man that means a lot to me. His name is Hector Rueda, he was born in Mexico. He came to the United States at the age of 13 and left behind his family, friends, and the only life he had known to have a better life. When he was 14 he moved to a very poor town in Chicago, Illinois. It was during Middle School where he decided he wanted to serve the country that gave him the opportunity to be free and to have a good education. He joined the reserves when he was 17 while attending High School, after graduating High School he went on to complete the ROTC program in the University of Illinois. He graduated and immediately was deployed.

My hero is a good role model because he is strong and motivated. He has many awards from when he was deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan. He also has a really nice sword that was awarded to him. My Dad never gives up because he likes to succeed in work and in life. My Dad motivates me to be better in life by showing me how to help people and how to work hard. He wants me to accomplish my goals and get good grades because education and hard work pay off. He tells me that good grades are very important and learning opens many doors. Sometimes I just feel like giving up on something and he tells me no to he tells me to stay positive and keep on going. He helps me understand that life isn’t always easy, but that we must stay positive and fight for what we want.

I’m really happy that my Dad joined the Army because if he hadn’t I wouldn’t have the liberty I have to write this essay or say how I feel. He helps keep this county safe and that makes me very proud. There are times when I get sad because he has to leave, but I know he has to work and he has to go away to help keep so many other people safe. Some cool facts about my Dad are that he loves animals, running, soccer and dancing. I think he is an awesome struck Dad and he makes me proud every day.

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