



TO OUR UCLA OPERATION MEND FAMILY

The celebration of our 10th anniversary inspired a year of growth and renewal in 2018. Every day we work hard to ensure positive outcomes for our wounded warriors and their families. We are excited to announce new leadership and highlight the generosity of private individuals, philanthropic organizations, and major corporations that have stepped up to help solidify a foundation for the future of UCLA Operation Mend. Please enjoy the following stories.

A FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE – WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT'S RENEWED COMMITMENT



We are proud to share that this October, Wounded Warrior Project will announce its renewed five-year commitment to support the Warrior Care Network, which includes a new \$20.1-million grant to fund UCLA Operation Mend's Intensive Treatment Program (ITP) for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and mild Traumatic Brain Injury (mTBI). In 2015, UCLA Operation Mend joined Wounded Warrior Project as a founding partner of Warrior Care Network, along with Home Base at Massachusetts General, Road Home at Rush University, and Veterans Program at Emory University. Together with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which joined the network in 2016, the partners will not only treat thousands of warriors over the next five years, but also establish new models of care for treating the invisible wounds of war.

Operation Mend's ITP, which began in January 2016, consists of three weeks of on-site treatment followed by three weeks of provider-facilitated, peer-to-peer, telehealth transition support. Warriors and caregivers participating in the program have experienced statistically significant reductions in all symptoms, with a program completion rate of 97 percent. Starting in June 2019, Wounded Warrior Project's generosity will allow UCLA Operation Mend to more than double the number of warriors and caregivers it can help in its ITP.

UCLA Operation Mend remains the only program in the nation where severely wounded warriors can receive specialty medical care for their physical injuries, along with the renowned wrap-around psychological and social support for them and their families. As always, all services, including transportation and lodging, are provided at no cost. UCLA Operation Mend also is one of the few places where warriors can receive advanced diagnostics, evaluations, and treatment planning for PTSD and TBI. The demand for these services is higher than ever: in Fiscal Year 2019, UCLA Operation Mend is ramping up to treat 198 patients annually in the ITP, evaluate 165 veterans for PTSD and/or TBI, and see 75 patients for physical injuries. This level of service will require us to raise an additional \$5 to 7 million each year.

WELCOME TO OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TROY SIMON



We are excited to introduce our new Executive Director, Troy Simon. Troy began his career in healthcare as an undergraduate at the Air Force Academy. In his senior year, he was selected as the #1 choice for the healthcare administration career out of his U.S. Air Force Academy class of 1,067 cadets. After graduating in 1992, he spent five years as the Administrator of Medical Operations with the 77th Medical Group at McClellan/Mather Air Force Base before transitioning into a civilian career

in healthcare administration. Troy's most recent position was with California Cancer Associates for Research and Excellence, Inc., where he served for five years as CEO.

Troy grew up in Ohio, where he was an avid baseball player. He played all four years at the Air Force Academy, but passed up the opportunity to play professional baseball in order to fulfill his commitment to the Air Force. After living in Los Angeles for seven years, Troy has finally become a Dodgers fan.

MEET UCLA OPERATION MEND BUDDY, GARY GHAZARIAN



Gary is a native Californian, born and raised in the Greater Los Angeles Area. A UCLA alumnus, he works in the investment management industry in Century City. The Buddy Program is a great opportunity for him to stay connected with

the university, while helping wounded warriors and their families heal through social engagement. Gary first became a UCLA Operation Mend Buddy in 2013. Since then, he has had the honor of spending a significant amount of time with 11 warriors, some with and some without caregivers, doing things they mutually enjoy: watching sports, listening to music, going to the movies, and dining out. Gary particularly likes being an unofficial tour guide of the UCLA campus.

We asked Gary to pick one veteran whose story he would like to share. He offered us two. One veteran with whom Gary really connected had asked to see the movie *John Wick 2*. Gary was concerned by the film's violence, but his buddy assured him that he was fine with the almost comic book-style of the Hollywood action movie. He ended up really enjoying it and afterward they headed to a casual Italian dinner. They spent hours chatting about the soldier's background, experience in the military, and other topics. The man told Gary that he had not spoken with anyone like that for a long time and admitted that he had been secluded and in a dark place over the past year. Gary felt that they had formed a real bond that evening. Now they stay in touch between visits, and each time the veteran returns to UCLA for care, they get together and pick up where they left off.

Another veteran with whom Gary was matched came to L.A. from Texas with his caregiver dad. The soldier told Gary that he hoped to do two things if time permitted: 1) see a celebrity and 2) go to the beach to collect seashells for his

girl back home and watch his service dog experience the ocean for the first time. Gary could not promise a celebrity sighting, but he did take the veteran to a celebrity-owned restaurant, Café Habana in Malibu. Afterward, they walked on the beach to pick up shells and let the man's dog play in the waves. Up to that point, the soldier was quiet and reserved, but seeing his dog run up and down the coast lit up his face and made him happy. Ever since that moment, Gary's connection with this man has solidified; they have enjoyed spending time together on follow-up visits, including taking in a Dodger game with the man's new bride the night before the OpMend 10th anniversary gala. Gary even won a gentleman's bet with him that night, since the soldier did not believe that Billy Idol would really be performing for the veterans at the gala. On the following night, when Idol got on stage, the veteran insisted that they get close and take a selfie with Idol in the background. They had a fabulous night.

For Gary, being part of the Buddy Program has been one of the greatest experiences. He is almost embarrassed to say how much he enjoys participating in it. Being around these brave men and women is a humbling experience. They have been through so much pain and suffering, both physically and psychologically, but without exception, they are gracious and appreciative of the Buddies who take time to be with them and become part of their healing journey. Gary strongly believes that as a civilian and one of the 99.4 percent of the population that has not served in the military, he has a moral obligation to do whatever he can to help those who serve. Being in the Buddy Program enables him to fulfill that obligation in a small way. Gary also is grateful to Dana, Clare, and the entire staff at OpMend for letting him be part of this amazing program. The fact that it is at his alma mater makes it even better. Go Bruins!

To learn more about becoming an Operation Mend Buddy, please call (310) 267-2110 and ask for Dana or Clare.

WILLIE GEIST – YOU DA MAN!



On June 13, 2018, The Father's Day Council of New York honored Willie Geist as a 2018 Father of the Year. The Father's Day Council has been issuing awards to fathers for 77 years. We can think of no better choice than Willie. Together with his middle-school sweetheart Christina Sharkey, Willie has a daughter, Lucie Joy, and a son, George William. The Father of the Year award came with a \$20,000 gift, which Willie generously donated to UCLA Operation Mend.

Willie is known as an American television personality, journalist, and humorist. He is co-anchor of MSNBC's *Morning Joe* and anchor of *Sunday Today with Willie Geist*. He also frequently serves as a fill-in anchor on both the weekday edition and the Saturday edition of *Today*. As a correspondent for NBC News and NBC Sports, Willie hosts and contributes to NBC's Olympic coverage.

7-ELEVEN ROLLS BIG FOR VETERANS

On April 30, the 7-Eleven Cares Foundation approved a major gift of \$400,000 to help UCLA Operation Mend expand and enhance its offerings. 7-Eleven CEO Joe DePinto, VP of Operations Dan Soper, Chief of Staff to the President and CEO Dave Strachan, retired Global Logistics Director Judy Soper, and Manager of Community Relations Nancy Lear were all instrumental in making the gift.

“The 7-Eleven Cares Foundation applauds the outstanding and important work of Operation Mend in helping to heal the men and women who have courageously served our country. 7-Eleven is proud to make this special gift as Operation Mend continues to grow and needs help to serve our wounded warriors.”

— 7-Eleven Cares Foundation

In addition to this transformative gift, 7-Eleven VP of Procurement David Strauss hosted a 5-star benefit in Dallas on June 28, which raised an additional \$60,000 for the program. The event featured UCLA Operation Mend patient

and Army Specialist Joey Paulk. On July 5, 2007, Joey was injured in Afghanistan when his tactical vehicle was hit by three anti-tank mines, flipping it over and igniting the fuel tank. Tragically, his team leader lost his life during the attack; Joey was left with significant injuries.

He suffered burns over 40 percent of his body and face, smoke inhalation, paralysis of his vocal cords, and amputation of all 10 fingers. Today, Joey has re-learned how to walk, talk, swallow, and cope without the use of his hands. He is a spokesperson for wounded warriors in Southern California and is back to being active in his daily life; he enjoys snowboarding and soccer, and plays many other sports in his free time.

UCLA Operation Mend owes a debt of gratitude to the hard-working and caring folks at 7-Eleven. At the highest levels of the organization, 7-Eleven understands the impact their support will have on the men and women who sacrifice the most for all Americans.

HOLLYWOOD FOR MENTAL HEALTH



For 63 years, The Thaliens have raised more than \$35 million for mental health charities. Founded by the late Debbie Reynolds and led by long-time Board Chair—now Chairman Emeritus—Ruta Lee, The Thaliens have been fundraising through their generous donors and galas, which include the “who’s who” of Hollywood elite and honor a Mr. or Ms. Wonderful with an award designed by Walt Disney himself. Past honorees have included Frank Sinatra, Shirley MacLaine, Gene Kelly, Sammy Davis, Jr., Lucille Ball, Bing Crosby, Bob Hope, James Stewart, Rita Hayworth, Liza Minnelli, Carol Burnett, Sally Field, Mary Tyler Moore, Whoopi Goldberg, Clint Eastwood, Mickey Rooney, Hugh Hefner, and Smokey Robinson. Since 2008, The Thaliens have focused on the well-being of America’s heroes treated by UCLA Operation Mend. In 2014, The Thaliens made a pledge of \$1 million over 5 years to support mental health programs for UCLA Operation Mend patients and their families.



Earlier this year, The Thaliens Presidents Club, founded by Dr. Irwin Lehrhoff in 1971, presented “President’s Day Brunch Spectacular” at The Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Chairperson Stephanie J. Hibler coordinated the event and arranged for a sumptuous meal and entertainment. Honoree Pat Boone sang a medley of his memorable songs. The Thaliens are thrilled to have growing support this year, including generous gifts from The Madeline & Marvin Gussman Family Foundation. Madeline Gussman was honored with the 2018 Thaliens Presidents Club “Angel Award” for her outstanding contribution to mental health organizations, including The Thaliens. In the true spirit of her late husband Marvin, founder of the Marvin Group, Aerospace Dynamics International, and other Southern California-based companies, Madeline takes pleasure in helping others and seeing them succeed. *(continued on next page)*

At the event, Joey Paulk, Army Specialist Retired and UCLA Operation Mend warrior, gave a moving speech on the mental health needs of returning combat veterans. Other attending celebrities and participants included Ruta Lee; actor Paul Sorvino; Fritz Coleman; Stefanie Powers; Kira Reed Lorsch; Carolyn Hennesey; and Kate Linder.

We are grateful for all The Thaliens have done for the nation's wounded warriors and their families. The Thaliens are the one group of funders who provide not only monumental financial help, but also an emotionally supportive presence. We walk with them heartfully, arm-in-arm. The Thaliens are our family.

FLYING HIGH WITH LUKE'S WINGS

UCLA Operation Mend is excited to announce a new partnership with Luke's Wings, an organization that provides travel tickets and planning services for wounded warriors and their families dealing with issues similar to those of UCLA Operation Mend patients. Earlier this year, Luke's Wings graciously donated 50 free flights to our veterans and their families. The founders of Luke's Wings knew immediately that while veterans need flights, they also need flights for their loved ones.

People recuperate better with family by their bedsides who help pass the time, boost spirits, alleviate depression, and reduce the risk of suicide.

In addition to the medical and surgical costs associated with holistic care, UCLA Operation Mend provides financial support to cover the costs of transportation, housing, meals, and any kind of care coordination needed for patients and their families. We thank Luke's Wings for their generosity and salute their mission to "Reunite American Heroes with their Families."

● STAFF SPOTLIGHT: CLARE SUOMI, BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR ●



Clare Suomi and her family volunteered to become an Operation Mend Buddy Family back in 2009. In 2016, after lovingly caring for five warriors and their families, Clare happened upon a job opening for a Buddy Program Coordinator and knew it was perfect for her. Clare, who quickly earned the nickname "Clarebear," is an incredible team member. She is 100 percent committed to the warriors, their families, babies, service dogs, and the entire staff team. She makes sure everyone feels taken care of and is always interested in what everyone has to say. She is ever ready to talk about football or her beloved New Jersey. When she is not busy connecting warriors with their Buddies or recruiting new ones,

she enjoys her three beautiful kids—Josh, Jacob and Grace—who adore her. We are so grateful to have Clare on our team!

THANK YOU TO THE UCLA OPERATION MEND FAMILY OF SUPPORTERS AND VOLUNTEERS

Thank you to each and every individual involved with UCLA Operation Mend. Whether you volunteer in our office or in our Buddy programs; work in a clinic that helps care for our patients or at Tiverton House, where our patients stay; whether you made a financial gift or hosted an event, please know that we could not run the program without you. UCLA Operation Mend is growing every day, improving and expanding the care it provides. With your ongoing help and that of new supporters of UCLA Operation Mend, we can continue to fulfill our mission to heal the visible and invisible wounds of war.

TO SUPPORT UCLA OPERATION MEND, PLEASE VISIT:

<http://giveto.ucla.edu/fund/operation-mend>

or contact Nicholas Middlesworth, Director of Development, at (310) 206-2089 or nmiddlesworth@support.ucla.edu



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