

NATIONAL CONVENTION CHAPTER REPORT
RIO GRANDE VALLEY BLUE STAR MOTHERS CHAPTER 2
ALBUQUERQUE, NM
Hiltrud Ridenour, President
2011

FUNDRAISERS:

Our Chapter has been very busy this past year. We organized 23 fundraisers. They were all important, but one stands out as we had an award winning songwriter, Russ Murphy, perform for us at an event we called "Let Freedom Sing." He wrote the nationally acclaimed song, "Welcome Home, Soldier". This was a donation drive for our July 4th packing, and we sold raffle tickets for wonderful items donated which brought in \$5,000.

Another raffle for a handmade quilt made for us by a friend of one of our Moms brought in over \$1,000. Our boutique did very well and sold \$3,500 in merchandise plus \$900 in cookbook sales.

CHAPTER DONATIONS:

Because of these fundraisers, sales and kind donations made to our Chapter, we were able to, in turn, make substantial donations totaling more than \$15,000 to support several other service and veterans' groups including:

- *Homes for Our Troops, the National President's Project
- *Chaplain Fund
- * Cause (an electronic library)
- * New Mexico Chapter of Gold Star Mothers
- *Snowball Express (a group including several airlines who send children and their families who have lost a loved one serving our country on a trip at Christmas)
- * Wreaths Across America (this provided 103 wreaths which we helped lay at the Santa Fe National Cemetery)
- *Senior Quilting Ladies (these ladies made us over 365 quilts for our Wounded Warriors)
- *Palmer House (a new program providing a home for female homeless veterans with children)
For them we also collected and donated clothing, toys, furniture, bedding, and food items we could not send our Troops.
- *Male Integration Center
- *Paws and Stripes (This program trains dogs for our Wounded Warriors, specializing training for PTSD)
- *Veterans' Administration (We helped one spinal-cord injured veteran be able to go to the Special Olympics with needed equipment and made a donation in remembrance of our BSM family members who have passed away in the last year.)
- *NM Veterans' Memorial (where we hold our monthly meetings and our annual picnic)

COMMITTEES: Our committees have outdone themselves too!

PACKING COMMITTEE organized 5 large packing events throughout the year sending out a total of 1,700 packages to our Troops, plus 75 boxes for Wounded Warriors. They also gave out and sent a total of 500 Girl Scout Cookies to Chaplains, Commanders, the USO, Integration Centers, the VA Hospital and BSM Valencia Chapter.

BIRTHDAY BOX COMMITTEE sent out 30 boxes to our deployed Troops for their birthdays.

NECK COOLER COMMITTEE made 3,625 neck coolers sent in our packages to our Troops.

ARTS & CRAFTS COMMITTEE made about 1,800 decorated holiday containers filled with candy which were sent in each package to our Troops.

WELCOME HOME COMMITTEE with its volunteers made 110 trips to the airport and welcomed home over 200 deployed Troops. This included 5 special Welcome Homes for Wounded Warriors, one of whom was our very own Medal of Honor Recipient from NM, Sgt. 1st Class Leroy Petry. Each of these Wounded Warriors and our returning deployed Troops got a gift bag containing a special pocket flag; goodies such as cookies, candy, NM products and trinkets, and gift certificates for dinners and hotel stays. One of our donors is the Hyatt Regency Hotel of Albuquerque who has donated a total of 56 gift certificates for a night's stay for two including a free breakfast for our Troops returning from deployment. The value of each of these certificates is \$150. In addition to the 200+ deployed troops who were welcomed home, there were countless other unexpected Troops and Veterans greeted during these welcomes. Each of them received one of the nearly 1,200 pocket flags we helped fold and give out.

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

We have Blue Star Moms volunteer to man the Veterans' Memorial the 3rd Saturday of every month who answer the phone, greet visitors and show them around. Our Moms also help keep the grounds clean and trim the rose garden. We help decorate a giant patriotic Christmas tree every year at the Memorial. As mentioned earlier, this is where we hold our monthly meetings, our annual picnic, and Christmas Potluck.

Every year we decorate two patriotic Christmas trees at the Albuquerque Airport to honor our Troops, Veterans and our Fallen Heroes. Blue Star Moms put a picture of their sons or daughters on a blue star ornament which is hung on the trees. The Gold Star Moms put a picture of their sons or daughters on a gold star ornament which is hung on the trees during a ceremony where we read the names of our Fallen Heroes.

We honored one family with a Blue to Gold Ceremony in Roswell, NM.

We hosted our first annual Gold Star Mothers' Luncheon in honor of Gold Star Mother's Day and the first annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans' Day.

Many of our Moms volunteered for the Wounded Warrior Project Annual Benefit Dinner and Dance and for the Ooh La La Christmas Home Tour. These projects raised \$513,000 which goes to help our Wounded Warriors.

We attended ceremonies for Memorial Day, Veterans' Day and the State Fair Military Appreciation Day. We gave 13 radio and television interviews, gave talks at many different events, and had an information booth with our boutique at many functions throughout the year.

Thanks to the good relationship we have with the Kirtland Air Force Base and to one of our Blue Star Moms who works there, we had a very special tour of the whole Base.

Lastly, one of our biggest events and fundraisers yet is currently underway, as we are hosting and co-sponsoring the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Tower Run in New Mexico to commemorate the 10th Anniversary of 9/11.

All of this is made possible as we try to keep our membership aware of all our activities and events through informative Mail Calls. These are written and e-mailed 2 to 3 times a week, or as often as necessary, by one of our very dedicated Moms.