

HISTORY OF THE SEMPER FI FUND

"Our Mission is Crucial. Our Duty is Clear."



Our story began in the spring of 2003. Just back from Operation Iraqi Freedom, the first wave of wounded Marines and Sailors landed at Camp Pendleton, California. Karen Guenther, a registered nurse and spouse of an active duty Marine, saw firsthand the challenges faced by wounded Marines and Sailors as they returned from Iraq. She, along with a determined group of military spouses (Annette Conway, Sondria Saylor, Helen Toolan and Karen Kelly) began to organize welcome home activities at the hospital, arranged travel for family members who couldn't afford airfare, provided a specialized van for a quadriplegic Marine through the generosity of donors (like retired Marine Colonel Jack Kelly) and assembled and distributed care bags filled with toiletries and phone cards. Still, the injured kept coming.

Realizing that a growing number of families across the nation were facing similar situations, Karen brought together a dynamic team to expand the initial efforts to become a nationwide nonprofit so that wounded and critically ill service members and their families would never be alone or forgotten. In May of 2004, Wendy Lethin, Dawn Olson and Sarah Dalke came on board to take this dream to incorporation. Soon Joanna Woblewski, Lyndsie Hesner, Rene Bardorf and Liz Quist joined them. The mission was clear: to provide wounded, critically ill and injured service members with immediate financial assistance and quality of life solutions to lift the burdens of their new reality, so that each family could focus on their loved one's recovery. The Fund's first official donation came from the Lighthouse Christian Church in Oceanside, California, and by the end of the first year more than \$2 million had been raised. The group's first official headquarters? Karen's kitchen table.

Thousands of lives and families would be changed for the better over the years that followed as Semper Fi Fund's efforts and reputation grew. Service members and donors alike knew that the Fund had made a commitment to support service members not just at the time of injury or illness, but for a lifetime if necessary. With administration and fundraising costs kept to an absolute minimum, about 6% since inception, the Fund is able to commit to giving the majority of every dollar to those who truly need it.

Wanting to expand its efforts beyond Marines and Sailors, the Semper Fi Fund announced in June 2012, the creation of America's Fund, a self-funded program of the Semper Fi Fund created to direct urgently needed resources and financial support to combat wounded, critically ill and catastrophically injured members of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families.

As of June 2018, the Semper Fi Fund has provided more than \$176 million in assistance to more than 21,000 wounded service members and their families. The Fund has a dedicated and passionate staff plus hundreds of volunteers across the nation and overseas.



Now in its second decade, the Semper Fi Fund's goal remains the same as it was on day one: to embody the spirit of our name—Semper Fi—and to remain always faithful in our crucial mission of serving those who preserve our freedom.



*The Semper Fi Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.
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