Ten years. Absolutely amazing!

Back in early 2003, a year before the Semper Fi Fund was born, I was working as a Registered Nurse at Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton and Balboa Naval Hospital. Most of the 25,000 Marines and Sailors from Camp Pendleton were deployed to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF-I). Emotions ran high as the news delivered vivid images of combat into our living rooms where we gathered in hopes of catching a glimpse of our husbands who had been sent to war.

It was that day in March that changed my life in miraculous ways. While on duty, I was invited to meet some of the first medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) combat wounded who were due to arrive at the hospital. Each one I saw reminded me of the incredible bravery of our service members and their profound sacrifices. I was struck by the thought of how they would cope with their new existence with the wounds they had suffered.

A few of us at the hospital began to provide simple support. We assembled welcome home packages that provided some basic necessities and provided emotional support to families who were now faced with the new challenges associated with bringing a wounded family member back home.

One day I met a service member paralyzed from trauma sustained in combat. He was a quadriplegic who desperately needed adapted transportation. Through a gracious donation, we delivered a van to this courageous young man. This was, however, only one out of many more like him that we knew were out there.

A small group of wives from 1st Marine Division started meeting each week around my kitchen table. We tried to do whatever we could to help, realizing that the need was enormous and feeling, quite frankly, a little overwhelmed. It became apparent that we needed more ambitious goals; we set them with hope in our hearts.

In May 2004, we made it official: The Semper Fi Fund incorporated, and our first checks were delivered to service members who were in awe of the help that had been provided. But even then, we believed this was a temporary effort and that we’d be back at our day jobs before too long.

Ten wonderful years later, thanks to the support of tens of thousands of donors, we’ve provided assistance totaling more than $91 million to more than 11,500 families.

The phrase “Semper Fi” is short for the Latin “Semper Fidelis,” meaning “always faithful.” To us, “always” means just that. Our goal is to provide assistance so long as we find a service member in need. Those who have been catastrophically wounded, or are injured or ill, will need support for the rest of their lives.

The Semper Fi Fund is here for the long haul. We’re dedicated to fulfilling our pledge—to always serve those in need from all branches of the military who have sacrificed so much for their Nation.

While we’ve helped Marines and Sailors since inception, we expanded our support to help Soldiers, Airmen, Coast Guardsmen, and Reservists. Our passion is stronger today than ten years ago. We consider our work sacred. Those we serve and their families energize and inspire us to keep this critical mission moving forward - and we will. Our dedicated staff and volunteers go above and beyond everyday to hand out miracles; none of this would be possible without them.

Thank you for your faithfulness and your loyalty to our efforts—we’re empowered to continue our important work. I continue to be honored to lead it.

We’re just getting started!

Karen Guenther
President, CEO, Founder
Semper Fi Fund

Great News! Now you can go directly to our website to get more info by scanning the QR code next to each featured story in our newsletter.

Scan this QR code and you’ll go to semperfifund.org to learn more about us!
"I just wanted to say how thankful I am for your help. You guys are truly amazing people. Words can’t describe how thankful I am. Thank you guys from the bottom of my heart."

"I just wanted to send you a warm thankful email explaining how much stress and how many headaches you have relieved! The Semper Fi Fund has been there for me way more than I could even imagine. I do not know how to repay the gratitude and willingness to give that you guys do. If you have the chance, please let the donors of the service animal fund know how thankful I am and how you guys have changed my life in many ways!"

"I just would like to first of all thank you guys for doing what you do. I have been working with the nicest case manager ever. Semper Fi Fund has been there to render assistance with school supplies and financial assistance. I really would like you to know that you guys are amazing. I really think I would be homeless somewhere with no chance to help support my own child if it wasn’t for Semper Fi Fund. Thanks again!"

"When I was diagnosed with PTS and TBI the Semper Fi Fund provided gas cards for my family to come and visit me in the hospital. Having them visit gave me the strength to complete treatment. SFF also gave me an iPad to help with my TBI issues. It gives me reminders for appointments and medication and also offers my brain challenges to get better. It’s an extremely helpful tool in recovery. But more than just the amazing donations, they have expressed true care and concern. My family is lucky to have found our case manager and everyone at SFF!"

Thank YOU!
“Military life changes a person,” says Andy Robinson. “Combat changes a person.”

Andy, a Marine Staff Sergeant who served with the 1st Intelligence Battalion based out of Camp Pendleton in San Diego, California, was changed by combat in some of the most profound ways imaginable. He was on patrol in al-Anbar Province in Iraq on June 20, 2006, when insurgents detonated an improvised explosive device beneath his truck.

“The blast broke my legs, collapsed my lungs, and broke ribs as well as my vertebrae,” he said. “The break to my vertebrae resulted in a spinal cord injury, and I’m paralyzed from the chest down. My hands and some muscles of my arms are also paralyzed. I am a quadriplegic.”

“When you join the military,” Andy continues, “the thought of sacrificing your life for your country, for your brothers in arms, crosses most service members’ minds. What many don’t think of—or don’t think of as often—is the possibility of sustaining lasting significant injuries.”

Part of Andy’s recovery included surgery to reinforce his vertebrae with titanium and to insert metal rods into his lower legs. It was around this time that he met caseworkers from the Semper Fi Fund.

“The Semper Fi Fund was there from the beginning of my recovery,” Andy says. “They assisted in paying for my family to travel to see me while I was in the hospital. They helped pay for my first adapted vehicle that accommodated my wheelchair. When another non-profit provided me and my wife with a fully adapted home, the Semper Fi Fund contributed $50,000 to that project. The Semper Fi Fund got me involved in handcycling and provided me with both a handcycle and a racing wheelchair as well as a piece of work out equipment for me to use in my home.”

Currently between jobs, Andy is enjoying his time with his wife, Sara, and his two-year-old twins.
“To me, the Semper Fi Fund means that there is a network of caring people who understand the difficult sacrifices that I and my fellow service members have made in support of our country. It’s not just a fund that helps offset financial complications that are a result of these sacrifices. The case managers, leadership, contributors, and fellow recipient veterans understand that recovery is a lifelong pursuit and is as much mental, psychological, and emotional as it is physical. The Semper Fi Fund has met all aspects of that need time and time again throughout my years of recovery as well as in the lives of countless other veterans and their families.”

“Disabilities complicate simple activities we otherwise rarely consider difficult. For example, the fact that I use a wheelchair all the time pretty much made it impossible to go on the beach unless I wanted to be hauled out there by my friends or family using an awkward and uncomfortable beach chair. Once out on the sand that’s where I would stay until it was time to leave. Not very much fun.

The Semper Fi Fund purchased an Action Trackchair for me that is not provided through my veterans affairs benefits and healthcare. This chair made it possible for me to enjoy the beach with my wife and twins with independence. I took my son on my lap and we went and chased seagulls while my wife and daughter got to play in the sand. This may seem simple, but consider going to the beach and only being able to watch your family enjoy themselves instead of participating in the memories. The Semper Fi Fund made that experience along with so many others a possibility.”
Sergeant Shurvon Phillip

Shurvon was finishing a patrol in his HUMVEE returning to base when it was hit by an IED in May of 2005. All were injured, but Shurvon was most serious. He suffered a broken left leg, lung blast, six broken ribs, and his jaw was broken in four places. Six days after Shurvon’s brain was deprived of oxygen resulting in his traumatic brain injury. Shurvon is now paralyzed and is unable to communicate with speech.

Over the years, Shurvon has made progress. He is now able to sit up in a chair and lift one of his arms, although each movement requires much concentration and effort. Shurvon continues with weekly therapy at the VA in Ohio, where he lives with his mom, Gail. Gail is Shurvon’s primary caregiver and has been by his side 24 hours a day since his injury. As a mother, “you have to do what you have to do.” She has given hope and faith to Shurvon throughout his long recovery. At the time of his injury she was working full-time, but after spending two weeks with Shurvon, she realized that her job was to care for her son.

“The Semper Fi Fund has helped Shurvon and I, in those very dark days, with paying my bills and rent. Because of this, I was able to stay by my son’s bedside 24 hours a day. When I cried, they were there - and cried a lot I did. Thank God for the Semper Fi Fund! They were, and still are, a great help. When Shurvon needed his handicap wheels, the Semper Fi Fund was there. They were there when I needed to get some much needed sleep providing overnight care for Shurvon. They make our new life a little easier; thank you Semper Fi Fund.”

© Gail Ulerie
Shurvon’s mother

Staff Sergeant Octavio Sanchez

Growing up in Fontana, California (east of Los Angeles), Octavio was intrigued by service professionals such as police officers, firefighters and military members. He enlisted in August 1998 after graduating high school and re-enlisted in 2001.

On June 16, 2005, during his first combat deployment (to Ramadi in Iraq), Octavio was trapped inside a burning vehicle following an IED blast and suffered third-degree burns over 70 percent of his body.

The Semper Fi Fund helped with financial and travel grants—“they allowed me to focus on my recovery,” Octavio says—and has remained by the family’s side ever since.

Today, Octavio is a stay-at-home dad to his three sons and one daughter, ranging in age from 6 to 16. He recently co-founded a construction company, loves to run (“at least four times per week”) and is looking forward to returning to school, perhaps to engage in deeper study of the Bible and his faith, which have helped him enormously over the years.
Together We Are Strong

HM3 Joseph “Doc” Worley

Joseph enlisted in March 2003 about a year-and-a-half after getting married. He turned 22 during basic training and deployed to Fallujah in Iraq on March 1, 2004. On September 17, 2004, he stepped on an IED while running to help others in his convoy.

“I remember thinking I was dead,” Joseph said. “I thought, ‘all I’m missing is my leg? I got this!’ I got the tourniquet on and shot myself with morphine.”

Joseph met Semper Fi Fund case manager Lisa while recovering in Bethesda, MD. “She means the world to me,” he says. “She’s just an incredible person with the kind of spirit and heart that reaffirms my faith in humanity. I will do anything for the Semper Fi Fund, anytime.”

“The part of me that made me want to be a corpsman is the same thing that drives me today,” Joseph said, “and that’s that you’re never more complete than when you’re helping people.”

Looking ahead, Joseph says he’s ready to start working again. “I want something where I can interact with people, possibly even starting my own business—something in the medical field, or something in computers.”

Captain Chris Ayres

Chris enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1995. Nearly a decade later, in April 2004, a rocket grenade attack in Fallujah nearly claimed his life. Shortly thereafter, at 34 years of age, he became the very first beneficiary of assistance from the Semper Fi Fund.

“I’m so thankful,” Chris said. “The Semper Fi Fund has shown that all it takes is a heartfelt idea to push something forward and effect change beyond anyone’s wildest dreams.”

“The first time I got out of bed and walked around with a walker, I looked out the window and started bawling like a baby,” Chris recalled, “because I saw the American flag. That’s when I really understood the definition of sacrifice.”

Today, Chris works for Hewlett-Packard Enterprise Services from his home in League City, Texas, where he lives with his wife and three daughters, ages 15, 10 and 7. “I thought it was hard leading 52 Marines into battle,” he says with a laugh, “but these three girls have tested me!”

Meet some of the many heroes whose lives have been helped by the Semper Fi Fund by scanning this QR code or visit semperfifund.org/heroes.
Walter Reed is a terrible, wonderful, exciting, boring, mystery of a place.

In the time that my husband has been at Walter Reed, he has undergone over thirty surgeries, spent countless hours in physical therapy learning how to walk, worked with an occupational therapist to learn to use his left hand again, had a rough stint with infections, detoxed from some of the world’s most powerful drugs, and accompanied me to dozens of marriage counseling sessions. He has also learned how to run, hand cycle, swim, mono-ski, drive, and even be a father to a beautiful baby girl; all without legs. The bad memories here echo in my mind just as loudly as the good. The amount of fear, prayer, and faith reached a lifetime high within the confines of Walter Reed Medical Center. The lessons I learned about unconditionally loving someone are unforgettable. Yet, with Josh’s retirement upon us, I can’t help but think about what will truly stick with me decades from now—that’s the friends we have made here.

A facility like Walter Reed is nothing like anywhere I have ever been. It is the only place we will ever go where the majority of patients are just like Josh. Imagine living in an apartment building where every room in the building housed a person missing a limb. Picture going to the doctor’s office for a routine checkup and every person in the waiting room is in a wheelchair. Think about picking up a new pair of legs or arms as often as you get your oil changed. You’ve heard the term, ‘There’s an app for that,’ well here, ‘There’s a prosthetic for that.’

The signature wound of OIF and OEF veterans is amputated limbs. While amputations are a terrible way to leave theatre, they are what bond the soldiers of Walter Reed together. We live in a world where wheelchairs, amputations, and robotic joints are more common than seeing someone walk their dog in the morning. But, how common will it be when we have all left and begun our lives as civilians? Ten years from now, my husband will be leaning on the fence of a Little League field in our once new hometown watching our children play ball, and because of his signature wounds, people will forever recognize him as an Afghanistan vet.

How strange will it be to look back and remember a time when we spent two years living in a hospital and amputees were a dime a dozen? Will we ever miss it? I know we will miss each other. Just like the bond these wounded soldiers share, the wives and children share one too. I bond with other wives here because we have all experienced the life of a caregiver.
When the spouse of an injured service member makes a comment like that, you know that something special has taken place. In this case, the something special was a “Dine & Design” date night at Camp Lejeune featuring a little food, a little art therapy, and a lot of smiles and fun.

“We do a great deal of work with the Wounded Warrior Battalion,” said Dawn Van Skike, Eastern Region Case Manager for the Semper Fi Fund who coordinates the Fund’s efforts at Camp Lejeune. “In this case, we came up with a date night that was an opportunity for those in the Battalion, those living in the barracks here at the base, to de-stress and have a little fun.”

Jacksonville Wine & Design—which, according to their website, “offers customers the chance to step out of their comfort zone and spend two hours harnessing their artistic talents and exploring their creativity”—came to the base for the “Dine & Design” evening armed with art supplies to help everyone get in touch with their inner Picasso or Monet.

“Art therapy is something we do in Semper Fi Fund programs nationwide,” Dawn explained. “So many of our service members are dealing with incredible stress. One person might be dealing with issues of post-traumatic stress, another might be struggling with traumatic brain injuries, and yet another might be navigating a series of appointments as part of the process of transitioning back to civilian life.

“In all these cases, art therapy provides a great sense of relief, if only for a brief time,” Dawn continued. “When you’re painting, you’re not stressing. Art helps cognitive skills, so it’s absolutely wonderful for service members suffering from traumatic brain injuries.”

Art therapy is just one way the Semper Fi Fund assists service members.
Learn more ways by scanning this QR code or going to semperfifund.org/assistance.
The Peter Murphy Semper Fi Fund Sports Program

“Recovery Through Sport” - What TSF/TAmF Has Been Up To In 2014!

Catch our athletes at an event near you!

Nearly 800 members are participating in training camps and events around the world!
Anniversaries are important. They give us the opportunity to take a breath and reflect on everything we’ve accomplished through the years.

When I consider the accomplishments made by the Semper Fi Fund over the past decade, I am profoundly impressed. The lives of more than 11,500 post-9/11 service members and their families have been significantly improved by the timely efforts of this very special organization.

That’s a remarkable number that has even more impact when you read the stories of the heroes we’ve been able to help—stories that vividly illustrate some of the many ways America’s finest have sacrificed their health and well-being for yours and mine.

Every Warrior’s experience with the Semper Fi Fund is just one part of the story. In many cases there are family members—parents, siblings, spouses and children—who also benefit from our assistance. There are friends who see firsthand how the assistance helps the service member. There are the members of the community who benefit directly from having a stronger and healthier service member contributing to that society.

There are all the dedicated people on the Semper Fi Fund side—a veritable battalion of people working tirelessly to assist our wounded heroes. The case workers in the hospitals who meet with service members and family members and assess their needs. The people who manage and distribute support with incredible speed and an absolute minimum of red tape.

There’s you—one of thousands who have contributed hard-earned dollars to support the Fund, and whose support is provided well into the future as the result of including the Fund in wills and as part of estate planning (learn more about the Legacy Society at semperfifund.org/donate/planned-giving).

The Semper Fi Fund, America’s Fund, Team Semper Fi, the V2V program—all of this, and so much more, exists to help our heroes because of the generous support of people like you.

So on this anniversary, let us all reflect on the accomplishments of the past decade—on the countless lives touched and enriched by the Semper Fi Fund, and on the teamwork among staff members, Board members, military personnel, civilian volunteers, donors and so many others that make it all possible.

That’s the kind of teamwork and regard for one’s fellow man I believe every American can support.

Happy anniversary, Semper Fi Fund—here’s to another 10 years of serving those who serve us all.

Take care of yourselves, take care of each other.

God Bless and---Semper Fidelis,

Al Gray, Marine
Chairman
29th Commandant of the Marine Corps
Thank You for Serving Those Who Preserve Our Freedom

Semper Fi Fund
825 College Boulevard
Suite 102, PMB 609
Oceanside, CA 92057
SemperFiFund.org

Donations may be made online: SemperFiFund.org
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Donate today and give a legacy for tomorrow. Please consider joining our Semper Fi Fund Legacy Society and continue to make a difference in the lives of our service members forever. Please contact:
info@semperfifund.org

For any additional information, please contact:
info@semperfifund.org

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