A Teacher in the Making

In April 2011, Gunnery Sergeant Benjamin Holmes sustained a fractured pelvis and several broken bones in his right leg after being hit by an improvised explosive device (IED). Despite surgery, Ben’s leg was eventually amputated below the knee.

During Ben’s recovery in the hospital, the Semper Fi Fund filled the gap caused by lost wages so that Ben’s parents and his wife, Diana, could stay by his side without added financial stress. Ben recalls how grateful he was to have his wife close at hand during such a difficult time. The Semper Fi Fund is proud to have an outstanding network of staff and volunteers who are dedicated to this crucial mission. Ben and many other service members who the Semper Fi Fund gladly assists often remark upon the amazing relationships they establish with our case managers and the refreshing flexibility of the organization overall. As Ben says about the Semper Fi Fund, “It is one hundred percent for us—no gimmicks. That’s unique.”

This past year, the Semper Fi Fund provided Ben and his family with an adaptive vehicle grant so they could purchase a vehicle that not only accommodates Ben’s injury, but also comfortably seats his entire family. The Semper Fi Fund also offered gas cards to help with the extra cost of traveling to and from the hospital. Ben regained his independence behind the wheel and can now enjoy driving himself to appointments and picking his kids up from school.

Ben and Diana have three beautiful children—Ashley, Chase and Kyle. Ben plans on becoming a teacher and looks forward to completing his credentials. He is currently student teaching at a local high school.
A Word From Our Chairman

For our valiant military personnel and their families, this will be the 12th consecutive holiday season wherein our Warriors are engaged in combat or other operations in the far corners of the world. Time and time again, our nation has called upon these gallant Americans to conduct complex operations under dangerous conditions so that our world can be a better place for all.

We remain free and enjoy our way of life because of them and the courageous sacrifices they make on our behalf. It has been my cherished privilege to spend time with these Warriors and their families through the years as they carry out their mission responsibilities throughout the globe. These remarkable men and women are truly unique as they wish only to serve others in their commitment to our country. My admiration for these Warriors and their families remains unbounded as they answer the call to duty time and time again.

Many of our service members have sustained serious life-altering wounds that will pose difficult challenges for them and their families for the remainder of their lives. Another vital concern is “invisible wounds” associated with the extreme mental stresses of conducting counterinsurgency operations in the uncertain irregular warfare environment. Finally, many of our people are in a lifetime struggle to come to grips with the critical effects of traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Unfortunately, the nature of conflicts like Iraq and Afghanistan, combined with the repeated deployments of individuals, suggest that many more will be diagnosed with these signature injuries in the years ahead. The responsibility now rests with all of us to do all we can to honor the heavy load carried by our Warriors since 9/11!

While we will certainly not be able to match the sacrifices made, we must “continue the attack” to spread the word to others of the compelling need to lessen the pressure on our military personnel and their families who have borne the terrible cost of war. Today, many Americans remain unaware that many of our Warriors will need lifetime care and support. In your own way, make sure they get the message. As we have said before, we are committed to the idea that, “No American serviceman or woman, or their families, who has suffered these catastrophic injuries, must ever feel like they are alone on the long road to recovery.”

As we embrace the holiday season and the joys of spending these special times with family and friends, let me take this opportunity to thank all of you—our generous donors who make it all possible, our Executive Director, with her incredible staff and volunteers whose inspirational efforts amaze all who witness them, our Board of Directors and Advisors who provide the policy guidance and overall fiscal leadership that makes our Fund truly second to none, as well as the many organizations and individuals who lend invaluable support. You are all very special people that make possible the profound impact the Semper Fi Fund has on the lives of others.

For all of you, our Nation’s Corps of Marines, and our Sister Services—take care of yourselves, take care of each other, God Bless and—Semper Fidelis,

Al Gray, Marine Chairman

On Sunday, Sept. 30, members of Team Semper Fi, the heart and inspiration of Semper Fi Fund’s rehabilitative athletic program, participated in the Tunnel to Towers 5K walk/run in New York City. The Tunnel to Towers run began as a way to honor fallen firefighter Stephen Siller and all 343 fellow firefighters who lost their lives due to heroic actions on 9/11, as well as the most severely injured post-9/11 veterans.

Eleven years ago, on 9/11, Stephen ran through the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel with 60 pounds of gear on his back to meet up with his own company, Squad 1. Stephen’s life and his heroic death serve as a reminder to us all of how precious life is. Through this amazing event, we remember Stephen’s sacrifice, and we celebrate the lives of others who continue to make sacrifices for our freedom today.

No words can describe what our team felt as they visited ground zero, talked with firemen, policemen and their families, and witnessed the appreciation of a grateful city. Emotions were high as NFL coach Joe Vist of the New Orleans Saints, followed in the footsteps of Stephen Siller.

At this point, it is a struggle to write the correct words to convey my gratitude in being part of the experience of Tunnel to Towers. In a sense, it is good to run/walk the steps of firefighter Stephen Siller, talk with the NYC firemen and view from a distance what is left of the Twin Towers. In a sense, it is going back in history and seeing where my journey began that led me to Iraq twice, and using a couple of my nine lives that a cat has. Overall, it was good to see where the war on terror began. I did place myself in firefighter Stephen Siller’s steps as I ran through the tunnel, nearly felt his presence, while hearing the music throughout the tunnel. As I exited the tunnel, seeing the firemen, West Point cadets, and hearing “Semper Fi” was nearly overwhelming, nearly to the point of breaking down in tears. That did occur later though.

Thank you very much for the opportunity and experience. As many servicemen as possible should run the steps. Once again, thank you for your leadership and allowing me to be part of Team Semper Fi! It is truly an honor and privilege, and all the team members are great Marines and individuals. —Kevin, member of Team Semper Fi

In Their Own Words

I have been so impressed with the caring that all of you have expressed. You know the families and take an interest in each of us personally. It is very touching. The life-changing events of this past year and the kindnesses of so many people have left a positive impression that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Thank you so much for hosting these monthly dinners. They are a life-saver for so many of us, and give us a chance to get away from the stresses of our lines and situations for just a couple of hours, and to laugh and get support from the other spouses that we don’t get to see all of the time.

In a Hero’s Footsteps

Honorary Board Members

General James T. Conway
Semper Fi Fund
34th Commandant of the Marine Corps

Major General Tom Jones
Honorary Board Member, Board Member Emeritus

John M. Dowd, Esq.
USMC (1957–1960)
Honorary Board Member, Board Member Emeritus

Rear Admiral Richard R. Jeffries
USN (Retired)

Kim Foley
“1st Lady of the Marine Corps”

Professor Stephen Siller
NFL coach Joe Vitt of the New Orleans Saints, followed in the footsteps of Stephen Siller.

Eleven years ago, on 9/11, Stephen ran through the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel with 60 pounds of gear on his back to meet up with his own company, Squad 1. Stephen’s life and his heroic death serve as a reminder to us all of how precious life is. Through this amazing event, we remember Stephen’s sacrifice, and we celebrate the lives of others who continue to make sacrifices for our freedom today.

No words can describe what our team felt as they visited ground zero, talked with firemen, policemen and their families, and witnessed the appreciation of a grateful city. Emotions were high as NFL coach Joe Vist of the New Orleans Saints, followed in the footsteps of Stephen Siller.

At this point, it is a struggle to write the correct words to convey my gratitude in being part of the experience of Tunnel to Towers. In a sense, it is good to run/walk the steps of firefighter Stephen Siller, talk with the NYC firemen and view from a distance what is left of the Twin Towers. In a sense, it is going back in history and seeing where my journey began that led me to Iraq twice, and using a couple of my nine lives that a cat has. Overall, it was good to see where the war on terror began. I did place myself in firefighter Stephen Siller’s steps as I ran through the tunnel, nearly felt his presence, while hearing the music throughout the tunnel. As I exited the tunnel, seeing the firemen, West Point cadets, and hearing “Semper Fi” was nearly overwhelming, nearly to the point of breaking down in tears. That did occur later though.

Thank you very much for the opportunity and experience. As many servicemen as possible should run the steps. Once again, thank you for your leadership and allowing me to be part of Team Semper Fi! It is truly an honor and privilege, and all the team members are great Marines and individuals. —Kevin, member of Team Semper Fi

In Their Own Words

I have been so impressed with the caring that all of you have expressed. You know the families and take an interest in each of us personally. It is very touching. The life-changing events of this past year and the kindnesses of so many people have left a positive impression that will stay with me for the rest of my life.

Thank you so much for hosting these monthly dinners. They are a life-saver for so many of us, and give us a chance to get away from the stresses of our lives and situations for just a couple of hours, and to laugh and get support from the other spouses that we don’t get to see all of the time.
EVERY MOMENT, EVERY TEAR, EVERY SMILE

When a service member is critically injured during deployment, the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany plays a pivotal role in their survival. Many service members who are injured overseas are transported via medevac to Landstuhl to undergo life-saving surgery and fight through the most critical stages of recovery. Only after their condition is stabilized are they transferred to one of the military hospitals in the United States.

The incredible doctors and nurses in Landstuhl say goodbye to their patients long before the recovery process is over, leaving them to wonder where those strong and inspiring service members are today. When asked how the Semper Fi Fund could help the amazing team in the intensive care unit at Landstuhl, they requested nothing more than to bring back service members who they had assisted long ago and who are now living life to the fullest.

This past October, Semper Fi Fund president, CEO and founder Karen Guenther was able to fulfill this special request. She traveled to Landstuhl, Germany with six service members who were patients there after suffering life-altering injuries years ago.

A special thank you goes to the Fisher House Foundation for generously providing the flights for the service members through their Hero Miles Program. It was an emotional and overwhelming trip, as the service members reunited with the medical staff who helped them through the initial stages of their survival and recovery.

It is difficult to adequately convey the emotions of the doctor-patient reunions that brought tears to the eyes of our founder, our service members and the hospital staff.

One hospital liaison witnessing the reunions was so choked up and tearful that she could barely express his appreciation for the Marines returning to say thank you. We’d like to give you a glimpse into a few of these memorable highlights of the trip:

**New hope:** Colonel Barbara Holcomb, Landstuhl commanding officer, was at a Marine liaison dinner during the visit when she stopped to talk to Navy Hospital Corpsman Second Class Daniel “Doc” Jacobs, who lost one of his legs in 2006. As she has done for so many Marines, she asked him what he could do for him. He told her he was looking for the doctor who gave him hope at a time when he had none. By noon the following day, Col. Holcomb returned with news that she had found his doctor. That doctor was instrumental in Doc’s recovery. In fact, after completing his recovery, Doc returned to full duty and became the first amputee in naval history to be assigned to an infantry unit.

Now, he would finally be able to connect with the doctor who made such an amazing difference in his life.

**Reunited:** Staff Sergeant Guillermo Tapada made his first visit to Landstuhl in 2010 under dire circumstances, critically injured and in a coma. On this trip, he was all smiles when the medical technician who took care of him two years ago, almost to the day, immediately recognized him. Guillermo had the rare opportunity to thank her in person for helping him get through the most important hours of his recovery. After the visit, Guillermo realized for the first time that he could remember the voices of the staff as they urged him to keep fighting.

**Pay it forward:** Lance Corporal Brandon Pelletier was ecstatic when he found out about this opportunity to visit with the caregivers who tended to him while he was a patient in Landstuhl. Brandon’s fondest memory from his time at Landstuhl in 2007 is of a visitor who came by and asked him if there was anything that he wanted. Brandon responded by saying that he would really like a cinnamon Pop Tart. Soon after, tears came to Brandon’s eyes when he smelled the aroma of warm cinnamon as the visitor approached his room. The first chance Brandon got during this visit to the hospital in Landstuhl, he asked a new patient if there was anything he wanted, to which the recently injured service member replied that he would really love a Frappuccino. Brandon was grateful for the opportunity to pay it forward by bringing the patient that drink.

Brandon was injured on Oct. 17, 2007. He spent the fifth anniversary of his “alive day” this year at the very hospital that he was originally taken to after his injury. For Brandon, it was an amazing and humbling experience that he will not forget.

Ambassador: Master Sergeant William “Spandy” Gilson, one of the first seven members to join our Team Semper Fi, was injured in 2006. He was extremely grateful for the opportunity to return to the hospital in Landstuhl and reflect on how far his recovery has come. Spandy was the first amputee to return to duty in the Marine Corps and has since been an inspiration to countless other wounded service members. Spandy is now a motivational speaker and is proud to spread the word about the Semper Fi Fund.

**Taking flight:** Army Chief Warrant Officer Anthony Radetic bonded with another Black hawk pilot who works as a nurse at the Landstuhl hospital in Germany. Anthony is on Team USA with the Paralympic Ski Team. He served 10 years in the Army prior to his injury and is currently a mentor on Team Semper Fi, inspiring new team members for a greater future.

**Morale builder:** Corporal Manuel “Manny” Jimenez kept morale high on this very special trip. He bonded with all the service members, caregivers and patients. He was able to share his experiences as a member of Team Semper Fi, which allows him to compete in marathons and triathlons all year long. Manny had a smile on his face the entire trip.

The visit was more powerful than anyone could have imagined. “Amazing. I think I’ve cried every day we’ve been here,” said Karen. “There are no words to adequately describe.”

The service members were honored to have the extraordinary opportunity to mentor other patients, thank the hospital staff and breathe new life into the hospital liaisons who work around the clock. For the doctors and nurses, the six men on the trip represented thousands of critically wounded service members who have passed through the hospital in Germany and who have gone on to live fulfilling lives despite daily challenges. The Semper Fi Fund is endlessly grateful for every moment, every tear and every smile that came out of this unforgettable experience.
Corporal Michael Nicholson enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in June of 2008 and was later deployed to Afghanistan. On July 6, 2011, Michael was on foot patrol in Afghanistan when he was injured by an improvised explosive device (IED). He sustained multiple injuries, including the loss of both legs and part of his left arm. Michael was first transported from Afghanistan to Landstuhl, Germany, before finally arriving at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., on July 10, 2011.

The Semper Fi Fund provided Michael with family support grants to relieve his family of the financial pressures of travel to and from their home in Florida, allowing Michael’s mother, father and brother to remain by his bedside during his recovery. The Semper Fi Fund also offered support grants to Michael’s friends who took time off work to be his caregivers at Walter Reed.

“...They’ve helped me out during my whole recovery; even if it was little, like a jacket because it’s cold up here. They provided me with an iPad when I was in the hospital so I could stay in contact with my friends.”
— Cpl. Michael Nicholson

Through a collaboration with the Home Depot Foundation, and with tremendous support from Hartmann Architecture, the Semper Fi Fund committed to a grant toward modifications of the Nicholsons’ family home, to include a new bedroom, an ADA-compliant bathroom and wider exterior doors, in order to facilitate Michael’s recovery and independence. The Semper Fi Fund also had the honor of providing a vehicle grant toward the purchase of a specially adapted vehicle.

The Semper Fi Fund is committed to providing ongoing assistance to our service members throughout their recovery, which can mean a lifetime. The Semper Fi Fund has already committed to a housing grant to be used toward the construction of Michael’s own adaptive home, with a ground-breaking scheduled for 2013.

SUPPORT WHERE IT’S NEEDED MOST

Special thanks to The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation and Go Daddy for their generous, ongoing support of the Semper Fi Fund.

In September, The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation generously donated $1 million to the Semper Fi Fund to support our nation’s injured and critically ill service members and their families. It is tradition for Go Daddy to produce an annual birthday salute to the United States Marine Corps. They created their annual salute with a new twist this year—they partnered with the Semper Fi Fund to raise money in support of our mission to serve those who preserve our freedom. Even more amazingly, Go Daddy and The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation have agreed to match all donations received through Dec. 31, up to $1 million, which could mean another $2 million in donations from supporters, Go Daddy, and The Bob & Renee Parsons Foundation!

NASCAR driver Danica Patrick sported the Semper Fi Fund logo, along with the matching donation message on both her Nationwide and Sprint Cup Chevys at the Phoenix races in November.

Go Daddy customers are also being given the option to “Round Up for Charity” on any purchase to support the Semper Fi Fund. By rounding up their purchase to the next dollar, customers are helping raise funds for service members in need.

To find out more about this campaign and how you can double your impact, please visit SemperFiFund.org.

SUPPORT WHILE YOU SHOP

Do you have a grocery rewards card? Donate money to the Semper Fi Fund each time you shop at Kroger, Ralphs or Food 4 Less. Check out each participating store’s website and find the Community Rewards or Contribution program listed under the Community tab.
Lance Corporal Benjamin Maenza became a combat engineer with the United States Marine Corps in January 2010. He deployed in September that same year with 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines in Afghanistan when he was hit by a 20-pound improvised explosive device (IED), which resulted in the amputation of both legs above the knee, shrapnel wounds to his face and multiple injuries to his torso. He arrived at the hospital in Bethesda, Md. on Oct. 24, 2010, and began his rehabilitation in mid-November.

The Semper Fi Fund provided Ben with family support grants so that his parents and girlfriend could be at his bedside during his recovery without the extra financial stress of travel between their homes and the hospital. The Semper Fi Fund also offered grants to help ensure the best quality of life possible for Ben, such as grants toward books for college classes, an iPad to communicate with friends and family, and a vehicle grant toward the purchase of a specially adapted vehicle.

In Spring 2011, Ben was seated at a table with Troy McLaughlin, Dennis McLaughlin and John Gerlaugh at our annual Semper Fi Fund event on the USS Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum in New York City. There, Ben shared how the Semper Fi Fund made it possible for his family to be present at the hospital during his hour of need. They now all say this meeting was fate. Though from varied backgrounds, each of these men had connections to the Marine Corps and understood that there would be others, like Ben, in need of the assistance that the Semper Fi Fund offers. Together, these four men formed a plan to set out on a journey to raise funds and awareness for the Semper Fi Fund by riding recumbent bikes across the United States. Ben would, of course, pedal his by hand. They dubbed this adventure the Ride for Heroes.

The Ride for Heroes group completed their journey on Aug. 10, 2012, just 60 days after the journey began. The team covered a total of 2,744 miles, averaging 80 miles per day. The Ride for Heroes group completed their ride and celebrated at Camp Pendleton, California, where they presented the Semper Fi Fund with a check for more than $92,000! The Semper Fi Fund is exceedingly grateful for these men and their outstanding efforts to support other injured service members and their families.

When asked what they enjoyed most about the trip, all four said they were thankful for the people they met on the road, many of whom stepped up to help the team along their route: When they ran out of water in Florida, a man who was out of work gave them his last $6 so they could quench their thirst. In Texas, a little girl who lived with her family at an RV park gave them a can of pennies that she had collected. The team was also deeply touched by the kind contributions of churches, local diners, chambers of commerce and other organizations that supplied meals, lodging, new tires and great company. Likewise, the Semper Fi Fund is deeply touched and honored by the incredible efforts and inspiring hearts of the Ride for Heroes team. Thank you, Ben, Troy, Dennis and John for your dedication to our crucial mission!

Together We Can Do This

As injured heroes from different branches of service are treated side by side at our nation’s military hospitals, requests for the Semper Fi Fund to assist all branches of military service have continued to grow. This past spring, in response to this need and due to a single charitable donation from Strandquist Motor Company, the Semper Fi Fund expanded its mission to begin America’s Fund, a self-funded program that currently assists those service members with catastrophic injuries in intensive care units at our nation’s military hospitals, regardless of what military branch they serve in.

America’s Fund was created to direct urgently needed resources and financial support to injured and critically ill members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families. Today, our first priority is to provide those catastrophically injured and critically ill members of the US Armed Forces being cared for in ICU units, with family support grants so that their loved ones can be present during the recovery process without the added financial stress of travel expenses or loss of income due to missed work. With your support, we can quickly expand America’s Fund’s range of services to match those of the Semper Fi Fund, ensuring that no service member is ever alone or forgotten.

America’s Fund,

We are truly overwhelmed by your organization’s generosity to our family. All we can do is say THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts.

– U.S. Army service member

Help us give back to those who have given so much. To learn more about this exciting new program, please visit www.americasfund.org

In Their Own Words

I wanted to personally thank you for the recent financial assistance the Semper Fi Fund provided me with. I am very humbled that this organization understands what enlisted Marines go through in training, in a deployment, and in the life after active duty.

Thanks to the assistance I am able to focus more on my treatment, rather than having more stress and worries. Knowing that the Semper Fi Fund is there to support us when we are in need of help gives me more hope that things will get better someday soon.

I just want to say thank you so much for everything your organization has done for my family. We are all so grateful. I want you to know that it will be paid back and much more.

I don’t take lightly what your organization has done for us, and I am in awe of the support that so many Marine families get from you all. Thank you isn’t enough, but it’s all I have for now.

I wanted to thank you and the Semper Fi Fund for all the help and support you have shown us. The home remodel grant enabled us to give Patrick his own space with the accommodations he needs.

We could not have done this without the Semper Fi Fund, and thank you does not say enough.
A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER – MARINE CORPS MARATHON

I’m not sure how we do it year after year, but once again, Semper Fi Fund’s ninth annual Marine Corps Marathon weekend events managed to surpass all expectations. This year’s marathon was the largest showing ever for us, with 35 handcycles, one sit-ski, and over 100 wounded warriors and their families participating; all told, a record-breaking 1,000 athletes ran for the Fund. Brought together by community and the spirit of competition, hope ran high and hearts ran full, making this not only the largest, but also the most emotional marathon to date.

Friday kicked off our weekend as Team Semper Fi (TSF) visited Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., to visit with wounded service members and their families from all branches. It was inspiring to see TSF members, who not long ago were patients within those very walls, return as strong athletes, sharing their recovery stories and lending an understanding ear to patients and families who are now just starting their journey. The impact of these conversations is beyond measure and is an invaluable form of support.

Saturday was busy, with preparation for the race. Our booth at the Marine Corps Expo was a hub of activity as Semper Fi Fund staff and volunteers championed our competitors and made new connections, pulling in new supporters for the Fund. On Saturday evening, over 500 attendees, including TSF and their families, our SFF community runners, and our MCM sponsors, came to our annual community pasta dinner. It was an evening to honor and celebrate our community, which does so much to raise critical awareness and funding for the Semper Fi Fund. We were honored to have two former commandants, General Gray and General Conway, address this extraordinary group to motivate and encourage our MCM athletes for Sunday’s race.

Sunday morning started with a 4:30 a.m. wake-up call, as athletes and family members readied for the race. General Gray and Sergeant Major Kent were right there at the start, as they have been year after year, encouraging our wounded warriors and all our supporters. We watched as handcycles made it up the steep hills and as runners—many in their prosthetics—pounded the pavement to a successful finish, bursting with pride and a sense of accomplishment. And we will never forget seeing General Gray join the race and run alongside a group of Marines (probably at least 10,000)!

A very special thanks to our SFF staff and volunteers for ALL of their work behind the scenes! Their attention to the smallest of details, their commitment, and their incredible love and support helped to make this our BEST Marine Corps Marathon ever!

Sending much love,

Karen Guenther
President, CEO, Founder

Team Semper Fi – Recovery Through Sport

Team Semper Fi is a sports team made up of more than 450 injured service members who compete in athletic events across the country. With their motto “Recovery Through Sport,” the team is made up of service members who have overcome significant challenges in their service to our country and have embraced a fighting, athletic spirit on their road to recovery. They are an inspiration to us all, but more importantly, they are an inspiration to their fellow service members who are also traveling down the road to recovery.

Thank You
MCM Sponsors:

FLIR
RAI
DONOHUE
hp
UBS
The Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization.

Source: Fiscal Year 2012 Audited Financials.