



WARRIOR TRANSITION BATTALION AWARD

A SPECIAL AWARD CREATED BY MUSTANGS WEST

Text by Bryan McQuirk
Photos by Larry Rivera

Mustangs West, located in Olympia, Washington, is adjacent to two of America's major military installations. Our club has always had a close relationship to our soldiers and airmen. Over the past years, Mustangs West has participated in many events at Fort Lewis. Several club members have deployed to the Middle East and, thankfully, returned. The club has continually watched for ways to be of service and such an opportunity recently appeared.

In retrospect it all began with a flag and a raffle, then turned into a unique experience for our club.

One of our club members deployed with his unit to Iraq, and was assigned to the embassy in Baghdad. He sent us an email stating that he had a flag that was to be flown over the United States Embassy for a day. He was then going to send it to us and asked the club to hold a special raffle of the flag at one of our meetings to raise money for charity. We voted on it, held a special raffle in May 2009, and raised over \$300. Then,

discussion began on what to do with the money. We had discussions on the possible donations at our June meeting. One of our members who is a retired officer and Vietnam veteran made an interesting suggestion. He had been donating his time counseling soldiers at the Warrior Transition Battalion at Ft. Lewis, Washington, which is a special unit for those who had returned from the war and had been injured. He suggested donating money to the Morale, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) coordinator to be used for the soldiers. I spoke up also, as I had just been medically retired from the military and I spent two and a half years in this battalion getting treatment. I told everyone at the meeting what the MWR did for us and how people had donated various things to the MWR for soldiers to raise their spirits as they underwent treatment. The vote was unanimous in favor of MWR. Due to my friendly relationship with the MWR coordinator, I became one of the liaisons.

After talking to the MWR coordinator, we ran into our first snag. There are regulations and laws preventing them from accepting cash donations. So we had to come up with something else to do for

the soldiers using the money. I sat down with the MWR coordinator and she gave me a complete rundown of all the things we could do to help: from buying tickets for sporting events, taking a group out to dinner, buy movie tickets, to donating movies and game consoles. After I talked with her, and looked over the list of things donated, we came up with a solution. Wii gaming systems had been donated, but they were short on games. So, we decided to purchase and donate games for the soldiers to use.

In September 2009, the club treasurer and I went to a local game store and purchased over \$400 in games, as a couple members contributed extra money on top of the raffle money. We invited the Commander and Sergeant Major from the unit to our annual car show on the 27th of September, along with anyone from the unit to present our donation.

As a surprise we also created a special award for our show. We would ask the soldiers who came to our show to vote on their favorite Mustang. We would then present an award named after their unit mascot to the winner.

As the final votes were being tabulated for the classes and the winners, the club

treasurer and I mounted the stage and began our presentation. I explained to the crowd about the Warrior Transition Battalion and how we were donating to them to make the lives of the soldiers more comfortable, and encouraged the participants to have their clubs consider it, too. We called the Command Sergeant Major up to the stage to present him with the games for the unit. As he left the stage the crowd gave him a standing ovation. We then announced the surprise about the special trophy that the injured soldiers had voted for their favorite car. By unanimous decision, the soldiers chose a beautiful 1969 Mustang that had been painted purple and had Purple Heart medals painted on the sides. What made it even more special is the owner of the car received three purple hearts in Vietnam, and the soldier who presented him with the trophy received two himself in Iraq.

The unit leadership has expressed an interest in continuing this partnership with our club at our future shows, and our club members felt very grateful to have undertaken and seeing through this project.

When we came up with this idea, none of us had any clue how to get it done, but it turned out to be a lot easier to do than we thought it would be. We wholeheartedly encourage all our fellow Mustang lovers and their clubs, no matter what size, to consider doing something similar to this. Not only does it feel good to do something to help those who have risked and sacrificed so much, but it also opens up our hobby to a younger generation. Our club, at the time, had a membership of less than 50 people, so do not think your club is too small to get something like this done, or that you have to raise large sums of money.

If we can pull off a public service project, so can every Mustang club. **MT**



▲ Command Sergeant Major Davis representing the WTB was greeted by Robert Minnieweather as the CSM received the club's donation.



▲ (L-R) Bryan McQuirk handles the emcee responsibilities as Jim Dahl presents Jerry Murphy with the WTB award.



▲ Jim Dahl and Jerry Murphy received a total of five Purple Hearts between them.



▲ Jerry Murphy proudly holds on to "The Phoenix Award."