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Plans Unveiled for Nation's Largest Gathering Ever of Recently Injured and Disabled Veterans

Coalition to Salute America's Heroes in partnership with the Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Defense and corporate America, unveils plans to bring together 350 disabled soldiers and their families at Walt Disney World

Ossining, NY – March 6, 2007 - The Coalition to Salute America's Heroes announced today that **three hundred and fifty severely wounded service members** from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom plus their families and primary caregivers will attend its **Fourth Annual Road to Recovery Conference and Tribute**. The five-day event, to be held at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida from December 14 – 19, 2007, with more than 1,000 people in attendance, will be the **nation's largest gathering of severely wounded troops ever**.

The Coalition to Salute America's Heroes (www.saluteheroes.org), a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 2004 to provide support to the severely injured from the War on Terror, spearheads this annual event to provide wounded troops, their families and caregivers with one source of information regarding benefits, services, counseling, insurance, healthcare, financial support, career counseling and employment opportunities. The Road to Recovery Conference and Tribute is truly the first step in their recovery.

"The Road to Recovery Conference and Tribute is a great example of how the private, public and government sectors can work together to help severely wounded troops and their families. We are grateful to the Department of Veteran Affairs, Department of Defense, government service organizations and other groups who are working with us to put this event together," says Ray Clifford, executive director of the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes. "This is the only place where these families are under the same roof with all these organizations and given the chance to ask questions, address issues and learn about resources available."



Access to Top Resources:

Wounded troops and their families will be given access to a broad spectrum of government organizations to get first hand information regarding their needs.

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) is critical in the planning of the conference, with the majority of seminars being conducted by their representatives. Sessions at this year's conference will include discussions on VA benefits and adaptive sports clinics. Counseling courses on PTSD will be conducted by the VA's top national team.

"Serving our wounded veterans is a top priority at the Department of Veterans Affairs," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "These are American heroes, and we're looking forward to the opportunity to participate in honoring them again at the annual Road to Recovery Conference."

The Coalition to Salute America's Heroes is a proud member of the Department of Defense "America Supports You" program, and works with the DoD in putting together the career fair.

In previous years, the Department of Labor has been a part of the fair, and defense contractors will be there to provide job opportunities for the service member and their spouse.

Government service organizations will be involved again this year to provide information relevant to each branch of the military. Those organizations include Safe Harbor, Marine 4 Life, Wounded Warrior AW2 and Palace HART.

While the recovery process is long and arduous for a service member, it is just as difficult for the family. The Coalition and its partners recognize this, and so much of educational seminars throughout the week will be on topics rarely addressed from their perspective including PTSD, relationships and coping strategies. Children will participate in Camp C.O.P.E., a therapeutic hands-on daily session that teaches techniques to deal with transition issues and their parents' injuries.

Emotional Healing

Apart from the physical hardships that such catastrophic injuries impose, many of these war heroes face crushing financial, mental and emotional hardships. Injuries take their toll on every aspect of a wounded hero's life, from emotional hardships with their families to difficulty making house payments to loss in income. Although less apparent, these struggles are just as destructive as any physical disability.

While there is no doubt that the conference will provide wounded troops with education and tangible tools for their road to recovery, the Conference will serve as a tribute and



thanks to the troops, a factor often underestimated that has emotional healing power. Previous conferences have featured national entertainers such as Toby Keith and Gary Sinise.

At the conference, service members will be given the rare opportunity to meet others with like injuries and life situations, share valuable information and encouragement, and learn through the examples of others about how to work through issues. Moreover, they will be given much-needed respite from the daily routine of treatment and therapy and given the chance to connect, reunite and recharge the family unit.

Two hundred of the most recently wounded service members will be invited to the event, representing a collection of the most common injuries from the War on Terror: severe burns, loss of limbs, traumatic brain injury (TBI), spinal and nerve injuries, loss of vision and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Since the event will be instrumental in setting recovery examples, explaining challenges and providing hope for the newly injured, 75 service members from the coalition's first conference in 2004 and 75 from the second conference in 2005 will also be in attendance. They will share their inspiring stories of recovery with the newly injured and help those families focus on benefits that are relevant to their new needs based on where they are in the recovery phase. Service members from the earlier conferences will also learn about longer term benefits from the VA and furthering their education or career. The conference is an opportunity for them to do just that.

Corporate America Stepping Up

The event would not be possible without the support of corporate America. Many of the country's top organizations have already pledged their support of the event and urge other companies to do the same.

Tom Murach, Senior Vice President, Customer Service and Support Technology for Bank of America says, "By supporting the brave veterans who have sacrificed so much for our freedom in the war on terror, we at the Bank are also supporting our customers, our neighbors, and the "family" of Bank of America associates, many of whom have friends and loved ones who have served or are currently serving in the nations Armed Forces. The Road to Recovery Conference is an important and tangible way to demonstrate our support to our troops and their families."

He continues, "The Conference is a unique opportunity for the private sector, government agencies and corporate America to come together to answer the call of our wounded troops in helping them rebuild their lives. Bank of America is proud to be a part of the event again this year and welcomes the participation of other corporations across the nation."



Michael Lister, president and CEO, Jackson Hewitt Tax Service Inc. commented, “As long-time supporters of our nation’s troops, it was a natural and honored opportunity for us to sponsor the Coalition’s conference last December. Since that time, our relationship with the Coalition has grown and we, along with our nationwide franchise system, look forward to supporting many of their efforts, including the December 2007 Conference. As a corporation with over 6,500 locations nationwide, it has always been important for us to give back to the communities in which we serve, as well as support those who support us so valiantly. The men and women who make up our injured and disabled veterans deserve nothing less than our nation, including corporate America, supporting them in their time of need.”

What the Troops Say

It is the job of the coalition to quickly to provide whatever emergency assistance is needed during a wounded service member’s process of healing and recovery. Most Americans tend to look at the big picture: nearly 3000 Americans killed and more than 23,000 wounded. The coalition prefers to look at the smaller picture, focusing on those individuals whose lives have been forever altered. Here are some examples of families helped through past Road to Recovery conference:

“This conference is the most valuable source of information we’ve received so far. There is so much here in terms of the benefits we are eligible for, job training and opportunities, the chance for our children to meet other kids that are dealing with the same issues and the chance us to meet other couples families who are traveling on this road to recovery with us. I am so thankful that we were a part of this conference,” says Summer Adams, wife of John Adams, who was injured in Iraq in 2003.

“The Road to Recovery Conference is amazing in that it really puts a lot of information out there, a lot of stuff I didn’t know before, about what is available to me. It was also the first time since I left the hospital that I was able to be around so many other men and women who were injured. Feeling that camaraderie again was incredible. And best of all, I am now considering several jobs as a result of attending the job fair,” commented Gary Boggs, who was injured in Iraq in 2005.

When it comes to providing tangible benefits for the seriously wounded, no other organization does more throughout every stage of the recovery process than the Coalition to Salute America’s Heroes, one of the nation’s leading non-governmental organizations for the severely wounded War on Terror veterans.

To see photos from last year’s conference, visit http://www.saluteheroes.org/pr_dec_2006.htm.



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About the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes:

The Coalition to Salute America's Heroes is a non-partisan, non-profit organization that offers several programs to assist disabled veterans who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan: **Wounded Hero Emergency Financial Relief** (provides urgent financial assistance to disabled veterans), **Homes for Wounded Heroes** (offers nearly cost-free, new or renovated disability adapted homes to men and women), **Hire A Hero** (reaches out through a network of organizations to help prepare and place motivated, qualified veterans in quality jobs), **Family Support Network** (offers special services to help relieve financial and emotional burdens facing heroes and their families), and the **Road to Recovery Conferences** (all-expense paid educational and service events for wounded servicemen and servicewomen and their families). For more information please visit the website at www.saluteheroes.org.