

## U.S. Army Europe and 7th Army

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RELEASE #2008-10-27-02

October 27, 2008

### USO 'Warrior Center' opens to serve wounded servicemembers at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center

#### Landstuhl Regional Medical Center Public Affairs Office

**LANDSTUHL, Germany --** Although her road to recovery had taken her from Kuwait to Germany, family still seemed a long way from home.



MICHELLE BARRERA

Sgt. Sheena Whitney, a mechanic with the Ohio National Guard, talks with her mother and sister in Ohio via video teleconference, in the new USO Warrior Center at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, Germany, Oct. 21, 2008. The USO staff coordinated the surprise conference for Whitney during the day's dedication ceremonies for the center.

But within moments of cutting the ceremonial ribbon for the newly opened USO Warrior Center at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center Oct. 21, Sgt. Sheena Whitney was visiting her mother and pet dog in Millersport, Ohio.

The USO Warrior Center was serving its first customer and fulfilling the same mission it has accomplished since World War II -- to boost the morale of servicemembers and serve as the link between them and the American people.

Whitney, who was recovering from ongoing back problems as an outpatient at the Military Transient Detachment at LRMC, was led into one of the Warrior Center's game rooms under the guise of a tour of the site's amenities. But instead of seeing video games being played on the center's large flat screen monitor, Whitney stared at the screen with amazement and asked, "Is that my mom? Is that my dog?"

After a lengthy chat her mom, Leatha, her sister, Danielle, and her dog, Midnight, the 23-year-old mechanic who had deployed to Kuwait with the Ohio National Guard gave a hearty endorsement to the Warrior Center designed and built specifically to serve outpatients housed in the two nearby Medical Transient Detachment dorms.

“This facility is absolutely phenomenal,” said Whitney. “I think it’s a big honor to be here for the ribbon-cutting ceremony and participate with the Medal of Honor recipients. They’re the reason I wear the uniform.”

Among the honored guests at the ceremony were five Medal of Honor recipients: Gary Beikirch, Drew Dix, Bob Howard, Gary Littrell and Herschel Williams. Other honored guests included William Timken, the U.S. Ambassador to Germany and a primary donor for the Warrior Center and Gen. Carter Ham, Commander of U.S. Army in Europe and Seventh Army.

During his sometimes emotional remarks at the event, Ham recalled his first encounter with the USO when he was a private first class lost in the airport in Washington, D.C.

“Somebody said, ‘Soldier, go up there,’ and I went up there and I found I was home, and that’s what the USO is. Whether you’re a young Pfc. or an old general, the USO is home, and it’s a very special place to be,” said Ham.

That sentiment was shared by Howard, who received his Medal of Honor for bravery as a sergeant first class assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne) during the Vietnam War.

“They are the ones (to) whom this center is truly dedicated ...,” Howard said in reference to wounded servicemembers who attended the dedication ceremony. “And those are the warriors who serve our country so ably and so bravely in the uniform of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

“Remember always that not one of these servicemembers had to do what they are doing. They chose to serve America in a time of war, and their call to duty now brings them here to this place where they continue to serve with honor and dignity. And now they have a place that they can call home, and that’s the USO.”

The Warrior Center at LRMC is now one of 133 USO organizations servicing 2.6 million servicemembers and families worldwide annually.

The first calls for a facility to serve outpatient wounded servicemembers at LRMC went out in late 2007, following the move of the MTD from Kleber Kaserne in Kaiserslautern, Germany, to the LRMC.

The MTD can serve up to 120 servicemembers. During their brief time as outpatients there, the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who arrive from Afghanistan and Iraq

are medically assessed to determine whether they can be treated and return to duty, or require more definitive care in the United States. About 5,000 servicemembers resided at the MTD last year, in one of two former billeting buildings at LRMC.

The USO Warrior Center features:

- A "living room" style lounge area furnished with reclining sofas and chairs and a 50-inch plasma screen television offering American television channels and sporting events, as well as a selection of DVDs.
- A fully equipped kitchen complete here Wounded Warriors can sit and enjoy coffee, soft drinks and snacks, including holiday meals prepared by USO staff and volunteers.
- A bistro seating area where servicemembers can meet, relax, read, play board games or use a laptop computer to connect to the center's free wireless Internet connection.
- A cyber café with eight notebook computers with webcams, headsets and microphones to facilitate communication with family or friends via e-mail or teleconferencing.
- Two hard-wired telephone stations and six cordless telephones.
- A high-tech, five-station video gaming room that is connected via multiple high-speed Internet lines to allow gamers in the room to compete with each other as well as with friends and family worldwide.
- A multipurpose room equipped with video games, tables and chairs can be configured for worldwide video calling and conferencing. The USO's United Through Reading Program will be offered from this multipurpose room, allowing wounded servicemembers to send sounds and images of themselves reading books to their children back home.
- An outdoor patio.



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