



Wounded Soldiers Wish Granting Wishes

By Gretchen Parker

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The wife of one veteran, a Marine just diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, wants a chance for her family to get away so her husband can reconnect with their two children. The place? Hawaii. After all, this is no occasion to think small. It's his wife's dream for him after he survived a traumatic tour in Iraq and injuries from a roadside bomb. For another Marine, the dream is a new leg that will hold up to his active lifestyle. The kind of prosthetic he needs -- one that will withstand his running and swimming routines -- is expensive.

They're both wishes that 20-year-old community super-activist Shauna Fleming hopes to grant. She's already raised \$25,000 for the project she's calling Wounded Soldiers (sic) Wish. She has received more than 100 wishes from wounded service members in just a few months. Fleming and her volunteer staff are sorting through the requests as she works to raise more money and spread the word about her new foundation. She said she wanted to step up when she saw a lack of civilian support and connection with veterans who are now coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan and are struggling with psychological and physical injuries. The service members who are writing to her have earned their wishes, she said.

"I was just seeing how much it was being glossed over," Fleming said. "Yes, you want to support them when they're over there but also when they're home. Once you're in the military, you're always in the military, and they deserve to be recognized and helped in any way possible."

Fleming just received another \$500 from DoSomething.org, which also is looking to grant money to other projects benefitting service members. The nonprofit is giving away two \$500 grants a week as seed money for building programs or as awards to projects that help vets or aid in disaster relief. Do Something targets young people who want to do substantial community service.

"If there is someone in the under-25 age group that is interested in doing something around our men and women who are serving overseas, then we're there to inspire them and to give them the resources they need," said Kevin Hughes, public relations manager for Do Something.

Fleming is Do Something's "shining example," Hughes said. The Orange, Calif., native is just out of her teens but is already an old hand at organizing mammoth military-themed volunteer service projects. As a freshman in high school, Fleming started A Million Thanks. Over the past five years, she has collected and delivered 5 million letters to service members all over the world.

Now she said she wants to help the men and women who are coming home so that they don't feel forgotten. Fleming is modeling her program after the children's cancer charity Make-A-Wish Foundation. She envisions granting even the smallest details of a service member's wish -- not just handing over \$5,000 for a trip. She and her volunteers will make all the arrangements for each wish they grant.

They're working now to build the Web site for Wounded Soldiers Wish. Until then, those interested in making a wish or giving money can go to Fleming's other Web site, AMillionThanks.org, and click on the tab for the wish program. Those who donate to Wounded Soldiers Wish can give money to the program as a whole or -- once the site is operating -- can earmark it for specific service members whose stories move them. With Fleming's record of success, she has no doubt she can make a lot of wishes come true. "I think the public is willing to help," she said. "I'm pretty confident we'll be able to grant a lot of wishes."