



# THE AMERICAN LEGION



How departments, posts  
and you can help





# Filling a gap

OCW provides valuable items that help warriors recover

Few programs illustrate The American Legion's commitment to wounded military personnel more than Operation Comfort Warriors (OCW). It is a living example of the organization's dedication to care for those who are recovering from injuries or illnesses sustained while protecting America.

For those servicemembers who have suffered physical or psychological wounds, OCW assistance helps supplement the high-quality care provided at military hospitals and transition units in the United States and abroad. OCW was established to provide items not typically available through the government.

These items, however, play important roles in the rehabilitation and quality of life of wounded troops.

For example, veterans may use iPods to help ease their tinnitus. Physical fitness equipment helps servicemembers regain their strength and rehabilitate injuries. Items such as pool tables, electronic dartboards and fishing equipment entertain and build camaraderie among patients.

Such gifts will not necessarily make these warriors whole again, but the items do show that the Legion cares and is grateful for their service and sacrifice.



## How to help

Monetary donations are vital to OCW, as most military medical centers are not equipped to store large quantities of care packages. Individuals from throughout The American Legion Family can donate online or by mailing a check. No contribution is too small.

Donations can also be made via departments and posts. Additionally, departments and posts are encouraged to contribute to this effort by holding fundraisers. Posts can contribute individually, or team up with an Auxiliary unit, Sons of The American Legion squadron, Legion Riders chapter, church group or charitable organization to raise funds for OCW.

Visit [www.legion.org/ocw](http://www.legion.org/ocw) to make a donation.

You can also mail checks to: **Operation Comfort Warriors,  
The American Legion, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**

# OPERATION LANDSTUHL



## From broken TVs to helpful gifts

Operation Landstuhl morphed into the current effort to provide for recovering servicemembers

Broken television sets. A lack of personal belongings, due to being transported from the battlefield directly to a military hospital.

That's what wounded U.S. servicemembers faced at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany when then-American Legion National Commander Paul Morin visited in May 2007.

Morin returned to the United States with a mission: Raise \$50,000 within six weeks to purchase comfort items for recovering servicemembers at the military hospital. The American Legion Family rallied to the cause, raising more than \$257,000 in the short span of time.

The money purchased television sets, stereos, long-distance calling cards, pool tables and other items to make the warriors' stay at Landstuhl as comfortable as possible.

Hearing of similar needs at other military hospitals and warrior transition units, then-National Commander David K. Rehbein expanded the program's outreach in December 2008 and renamed it Operation Comfort Warriors.

Today, OCW continues to provide comfort items, recreational experiences and more for those recovering in military hospitals and transition units.

### First place fund

In 2010, the people voted and the troops won.

Operation Comfort Warriors beat more than 700 other charities in an online contest sponsored by Pepsi. OCW received \$250,000 in the "Refresh Everything" campaign. The money was used to purchase comfort items for recovering servicemembers.

# How the program works

Legion headquarters staff evaluates the need, then purchases comfort items from donated funds

Operation Comfort Warriors purchases and distributes items considered “non-essential” and therefore not normally provided by the government. Before that happens, though, the Legion’s national headquarters staff verifies the need and authenticity of the claim.

## Did you know?

**100 percent** of donated funds go directly to purchasing items and providing recreational activities for recovering warriors. All of OCW’s administrative and marketing expenses are covered by membership dues received by the Legion.

Most often, the Legion contacts officials at military hospitals, warrior transition units and surrounding communities to obtain lists to determine which items are needed by wounded, injured or ill servicemembers. Once a need is identified, the Legion orders the items and delivers them. Red tape not included.

Generally, there are two types of purchases made:

**INDIVIDUAL GRANTS:** These go directly to a recovering warrior. The recipient does not have to be a Legion member but the case must be reviewed and approved by a Legionnaire who can vouch for the need and confirm the applicant’s veteran status. These grants are often awarded through the Legion’s Heroes to Hometowns transition teams.

**UNIT GRANTS:** These go directly to a facility, where multiple servicemembers benefit. For example, a transition unit might need exercise equipment for those who are rehabbing injuries. Or a facility might request entertainment products, photography equipment or sports gear for warriors.



# In Their Words

Joint Base Lewis-McChord: Gifts will 'pep them up and cheer them up'

The Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) at Joint Base Lewis-McChord in Washington state is among dozens of facilities that have received OCW donations from The American Legion.

A cache of Amazon gift cards, adaptive sports equipment and other items were provided to battalion officials, who were grateful for the donations.

Battalion Logistics Officer Capt. Chris Licking said, "We were very thankful for The American Legion's support because through official military channels, we have a lot of rules we have to follow to maintain the way things are given as far as gifts and things – we can't quite do what we'd like to do.

The American Legion was able to give us a lot of assistance. ... We're receiving various and sundry things from The American Legion that will help these guys get active, get out, get some fresh air, get into their community, as well as some things that will just pep them up and cheer them up."



For example, Chip Townsend, WTB transportation coordinator, cited four golf carts donated by OCW. "(Those) are really going to assist us in augmenting what our original transportation piece used to be," Townsend said. "... We'll be able to use them here in the footprint to get soldiers around when they move from building to building; be able to help with the building folks when we have work orders to be done – moving supplies around and whatnot."

The gifts truly resonate with servicemembers, WTB outreach coordinator Woody Stone said, because of the bond warriors share with Legionnaires.

"You have people who actually understand what these soldiers – whether they're here because they're combat-wounded, whether they're injured in a training accident, or whether they've become ill and are trying to recover – those soldiers have been through a number of different experiences that our Legionnaires are really able to connect with," Stone said. "And soldiers appreciate that. They sense that there's somebody who really understands what they've gone through."

# In Their Words

Fort Gordon 'grateful for the community spirit and kindness'

OCW donations often assist servicemembers by providing them with rehabilitation equipment and social activities. One such successful effort helped the Warrior Transition Battalion (WTB) at Fort Gordon, Ga.

The facility received gifts including occupational therapy equipment, Visa gift cards, a DVD library and GPS systems. Lt. Col. Edwin Larkin, then commander of the battalion, wrote the Legion a letter expressing his appreciation. It read in part:

"Fort Gordon is a very unique WTB because of the population. Our soldiers come from all over the world for treatment, but their family members still live in their original communities, often long distances away.



"The occupational therapy equipment that was purchased was much more than just adaptive volleyball and badminton equipment. The equipment purchased is modified and designed for a specific purpose. The modified nets are attached to poles and only sit three feet from the ground. The game

is played on the floor to accommodate lower-extremity injuries. Servicemembers will sit on the floor and will use their arms and their legs to move around to get to the ball. For those with back injuries who can't get on the floor, we will modify it so that they can play from a special sports wheelchair. The balls look like a regular volleyball, but they are lightweight so that the game can be slowed down for soldiers with traumatic brain injuries, poor vision or limits in motion. This equipment supplied an opportunity for a wounded warrior to belong to a team again. ... The grant money supplied a smile that can only come from getting the ball over a net for the first time and making a point for your team.

"Contributions from the community make a difference in the lives at the Warrior Transition Battalion. It takes a village to transition our ill, injured and wounded, and we are grateful for the community spirit and kindness of The American Legion and its members. We are very grateful to have you as part of our team in providing a well-rounded, caring approach to these soldiers and families."



## What departments can do

One idea: Host fundraiser during department convention

A recovering Marine is thankful for the fitness equipment that will help him rehabilitate injuries suffered during combat.

A soldier still healing from severe burns received during an incident in Iraq receives loose-fitting sweatsuits to ease her suffering.

A group of servicemembers at a warrior transition unit rejoices when presented with a collection of entertainment items, including DVDs, CDs and gift cards.

### Uplifting gifts

Some gifts are not an object, but rather an experience. Take, for example, cultural retreats.

For those recovering at Landstuhl in Germany, donations pay for relaxing and rewarding trips.

“They may be here physically, but emotionally many are still down range,” said Cmdr. Manuel Mak, a Navy chaplain. “Trips to some of these cultural and historical sites provide the opportunity for servicemembers to de-stress before reaching a crisis point.”

“Delivering comfort items is at the heart of Operation Comfort Warriors,” American Legion National Commander Jim Koutz said. “This program illustrates the Legion’s unwavering commitment to care for our servicemen and women who defended our nation. As they recover from their physical and emotional scars, we must be there for them.”

Departments can play a critical role in the success of this program. For example, a fundraiser during a department convention with the proceeds going to OCW can be a major help.



# What posts can do

Include the whole Legion Family in fundraising efforts

Donations that go to Operation Comfort Warriors do not magically happen.

Thoughtful planning, strong communication and a kind heart are all necessary to orchestrate successful fundraisers that benefit OCW.

Traditional post fundraisers - fish fries, barbecues, motorcycle rides, golf outings, walkathons, etc. - are ideal for generating donations to OCW. Posts may also want to consider restaurant dine-ins, fundraisers in which restaurant owners agree to donate 10 percent or 15 percent of money spent by customers who show an OCW flyer on a designated night.

When planning fundraisers, posts are encouraged to include the Legion Family - SAL squadrons, Auxiliary units and Riders chapters. They can help promote an event and generate more involvement.

Posts are also reminded to emphasize one key aspect that separates OCW from other charities: One hundred percent of donations to OCW go toward purchasing comfort items for wounded, sick or ill servicemembers.

## Share success

If your post has a successful Operation Comfort Warriors fundraiser, we want to hear about it.

Post your success story at **legiontown.org**.

It would be helpful to include information about what made it a success. For example, how did you market it? Did you form an alliance with a church, or other nonprofit organization? Were other members of the Legion Family especially helpful in coordinating the event, or raising funds?



# Your donations, their smiles

Canoes, games, fitness equipment fill needs of wounded warriors

To donate, go to [www.legion.org/OCW](http://www.legion.org/OCW). Donations have been used to buy and deliver countless items that help recovering servicemembers. A small sampling:

## WATER RECREATION

- Canoes, kayaks, a launch dock and installation
- Snorkeling and diving equipment
- Fishing rods, reels, anchors, rod holders, and spearfishing guns
- Stand-up paddle boards

## EXERCISE EQUIPMENT

- Softball bats, batting gloves, softballs and jerseys
- Recumbent bikes
- Electronic ride simulator for stationary bikes
- Fitness heart-rate monitors
- Weight-lifting equipment and resistance bands
- Racquetball equipment such as rackets, eyewear and balls

## INDOOR RECREATION

- Pool tables, foosball tables, ping pong tables, air hockey tables and electronic dartboards
- Wii Fit fitness package
- Music equipment such as guitars and amplifiers
- Art supplies such as paints, utensils and pottery equipment



## The beneficiaries

The Legion has provided comfort items to military hospitals, warrior transition units and other institutions worldwide. Among the beneficiaries:

Walter Reed Army Medical Center (Washington), Bethesda Naval Hospital (Md.), Landstuhl Regional Medical Center (Germany), Joint Base Lewis-McChord (Tacoma, Wash.), Fort Hood (Texas), Fort Bragg (N.C.), Camp Lejeune (N.C.), Portsmouth Naval Hospital (Va.), Fort Carson (Colo.), Fort Drum (N.Y.), Fort Stewart (Ga.), Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center (Twentynine Palms, Calif.), Fort Campbell (Ky.), Tripler Army Medical Center (Honolulu, Hawaii), Fort Riley (Ky.), Camp Pendleton (Calif.), Fort Gordon (Ga.), Fort Bliss (Texas), Fort Knox (Ky.), The American Legion Department of France, Medevac point (Afghanistan), Brooke Army Medical Center (Fort Sam Houston, Texas), Navy Medical Center San Diego, Veterans Affairs Medical Center - Palo Alto (Calif.), Fort Benning (Ga.), GI Film Festival (Washington), Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Minneapolis and Roudebush VAMC in Indianapolis.





**"It's nice to see an organization that comes out and gives back not only to the servicemember but to the families and also to those who support the servicemember."**

*Robert O'Hagan, San Antonio WTB platoon sergeant*



## THE AMERICAN LEGION

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To learn more about Operation Comfort Warriors and to make a contribution online, go to [legion.org/OCW](http://legion.org/OCW).