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*([Read this release and access photos from the auction online](#))*

## **'Operation Mend' Camaro auction raises \$366K to benefit America's wounded warriors**

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A 2011 Chevrolet Camaro convertible donated by General Motors and custom designed by famous vehicle builder Ryan Friedlinghaus and his West Coast Customs team raised \$366,000 at auction to benefit U.S. soldiers severely wounded during their service overseas.

The [car was sold during lively bidding](#) at the Mecum Auto Auction in Dallas on Oct. 7. It will also serve as a grand marshal car in New York City's Veterans Day Parade on Nov. 11.

The one-of-a-kind vehicle, customized in a full camouflage motif representing all branches of the U.S. military, was donated to benefit [Operation Mend](#), a partnership between Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas, and the Veterans Affairs–Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System that provides specialized medical care to U.S. military personnel who have been wounded and severely disfigured in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The car was auctioned live on the Discovery Channel's Velocity network. Several wounded warriors who have been helped by Operation Mend were on hand to promote the bidding for the matchless muscle car. The winning bid of \$333,000 was made by Ben Mecum, who said he was pleased to purchase the Operation Mend Camaro on behalf of the Mecum family and the entire Mecum organization.

However, the sale of the camouflaged Camaro did not end the evening for Operation Mend. Inspired by the appearance of the wounded veterans and Operation Mend's senior surgeon,

Dr. Timothy Miller — a Vietnam veteran and a recipient of the Bronze Star for combat heroism — auction participants Tom Abrams of Reliable Carriers and Ray Claridge of Cinema Vehicle Services each added a \$10,000 donation, and an additional \$13,000 was collected from hundreds of buyers, sellers and spectators in the crowd, bringing the total donation to \$366,000.

All proceeds will benefit Operation Mend's comprehensive program, which provides veterans with plastic and reconstructive surgery, mental health support and other health care services. The program, which is funded completely through philanthropic donations by Americans across the country, was founded by Ronald A. Katz, a well-known inventor and philanthropist who serves on the board of Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center. Katz also attended the auction.

Riding in the Camaro with the winning bidder at New York's Nov. 11 Veterans Day Parade will be several war heroes currently undergoing reconstructive surgeries at UCLA through Operation Mend to repair their faces, which were damaged by explosions.

Dana Mecum, president of the Mecum Auction Company, and Friedlinghaus, founder and CEO of West Coast Customs, a luxury automobile restyling company, joined forces to offer the custom convertible to raise funds for Operation Mend. Both companies are featured in weekly programs on Discovery's Velocity network.

"Having the opportunity to create and auction a one-of-a-kind custom Camaro to benefit Operation Mend was an honor for me and the entire West Coast Customs team," said Friedlinghaus who has transformed cars for numerous celebrities and corporations. "The patients, families, doctors and volunteers provided the inspiration for this build. We have the opportunity to honor the men and women who have dedicated themselves to protect our freedoms, which is a privilege for me."

The Camaro's journey from stock to custom will be documented on Velocity's "Inside West Coast Customs" on Jan. 8. The show, now in its second season, airs Sunday nights at 8 p.m. The auction itself was broadcast live on Velocity's ["Mecum Auto Auction: Muscle Cars & More,"](#) which is now in its fourth season.

The principals of the project were brought together by Constellations Group, a strategic relationship and business development firm, with the mission of benefiting those who have given so much in defense of our country.

"It has been an honor to work with the individuals and organizations that made this project a reality," said Bill White, chairman and CEO of Constellations Group. "We are humbled and ever grateful to all the men and women who have put themselves in harm's way to protect us."

Operation Mend is funded by generous donors across the country. To learn more or to donate, visit [www.operationmend.ucla.edu](http://www.operationmend.ucla.edu).

The **Mecum Auction Company** has been specializing in the sale of collector cars for 24 years and is the world leader in collector car, motorcycle, boat and memorabilia sales.

**West Coast Customs** has grown into one of the most powerful and recognized brand names in the custom automotive industry, with franchises and other ventures stretching across the world and various media platforms. "Inside West Coast Customs" airs Sundays at 8 p.m. on Discovery's Velocity network.

**Constellations Group** is a strategic relationship and business development firm that advises corporations, foundations and high-net worth individuals on their business challenges and philanthropic endeavors. The firm strives to find ways across their client base to show their support for the brave men and women of our armed forces and first-responder communities and their families.

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