

Spirit of Hope Award recognizes assistance to wounded warriors

12/12/2011 **By Lance Cpl. Chelsea Flowers, Headquarters Marine Corps**

WASHINGTON — Ronald A. Katz received the Marine Corps Spirit of Hope award at the Pentagon in Washington Nov. 15.

Katz was recognized for his crucial role in Operation Mend, an organization that is a partnership between the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center, Brooke Army Medical Center in Antonio, TX, and the Veteran's Affairs- Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System.

"The award is a great honor," Katz said. "But I feel that I'm accepting it on behalf of the enormously talented staff at UCLA who performed the procedures and on behalf of the extraordinary service members we've helped."

Since 2007, the Katz Family Foundation has provided financial assistance to 54 seriously wounded service members and their families during long-term treatment of injuries received in Iraq and Afghanistan.

One of these service members was Gunnery Sgt. Blaine Scott who was injured in August 2006 by a roadside bomb. Burns covered 40% of his body, preventing him from seeing, breathing and eating properly.

The partnership Katz formed between military and civilian medical facilities allowed Scott to receive 12 surgeries to fix his eyes, give him a new nose and allow him to use his mouth properly for eating. Additionally, Scott's morale, self-confidence and quality of life improved dramatically, he said.

The award citation recognized Katz for "helping to restore the divine right to appear human to these young patriots."

Scott agreed that the work of Katz and Operation Mend changed his life in ways that never would have been possible otherwise.

"If it wasn't for Operation Mend, I wouldn't have gotten the care I received," Scott said. "I would never have had those surgeries done. My quality of life is so much better now."

"Katz totally deserves this award and so much more," Scott added.

The Spirit of Hope Award began in 1997 by the Wiegand Foundation in honor of Bob Hope, an actor and comedian who was known for his humanitarian work and involvement with U.S. Armed Forces. Each year, the Spirit of Hope Award is given to one individual from each of the branches of military, the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Coast Guard.

The recipients must embody the values of Bob Hope, which are courage, honor, duty, commitment, integrity and selfless dedication, as well as greatly enhance the quality of life of service members and their families and contribute significant amount of time, talent and resources on behalf of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Katz, through his tireless devotion to the nation's wounded warriors, demonstrated the true spirit of Bob Hope.

The other Spirit of Hope recipients were:

Janice Bridges, Army

Petty Officer 1st Class Jamar Salters, Navy

Tech Sgt. Leray Smedley, Air Force

Elaine Savage, Coast Guard

Segs4Vets received the organization award from the Office of the Secretary of Defense.