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Healing veterans at UCLA's Center for Collaborative Military Medicine

Philanthropist Ron Katz and Ret. Gen. Peter Chiarelli discuss the importance of the first university-based military medicine center on the West Coast.

Caring for America's wounded warriors

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By [Michele Richinick](#)

Behind every American military uniform is an individual man or woman with hopes, dreams, and aspirations. But sometimes re-entering civilian life after serving for the country proves difficult for them because of the mental and physical challenges they overcome.

UCLA's newly established [Ronald A. Katz Center for Collaborative Military Medicine](#) aims to care for the country's wounded warriors by solving individual's specific medical issues.

"These injuries are devastating. Not only do they disfigure the body—sometimes the loss of a limb or disfiguration of the face—but that kind of trauma leaves a person scarred in many ways," Ret. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, who leads the center, said Monday during an *Afternoon Mo Joe* web-exclusive interview.

The center, named for philanthropist and businessman Ronald Katz, is the first university-based military medicine center on the West Coast. Katz previously founded UCLA's [Operation Mend](#), which provides access to the country's top plastic surgeons for returning military personnel with severe facial and other medical injuries.

“Each of these young men and women is an individual person,” Katz said during Monday’s interview. “In the case of many...their faces were like the ‘Phantom of the Opera,’ and all of a sudden it’s put back together again and their lives are put back together again.”

Operation Mend has treated more than 100 veterans, many who endured about 50 procedures.

The center, along with Operation Mend, will fill the gaps in military medicine because treatment for veterans often does not compare as strongly to the levels seen at civilian institutions. There is no cost to the veterans; their transportation, housing, and appointments are paid for, Katz said.

It is one thing to see the transformation in veterans, but it is just as important to see the effects on each family, Chiarelli, a four-star general, said.

It is amazing, he said, “to see the joy in their families’ faces because they’ve had a loved one returned to them.”

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