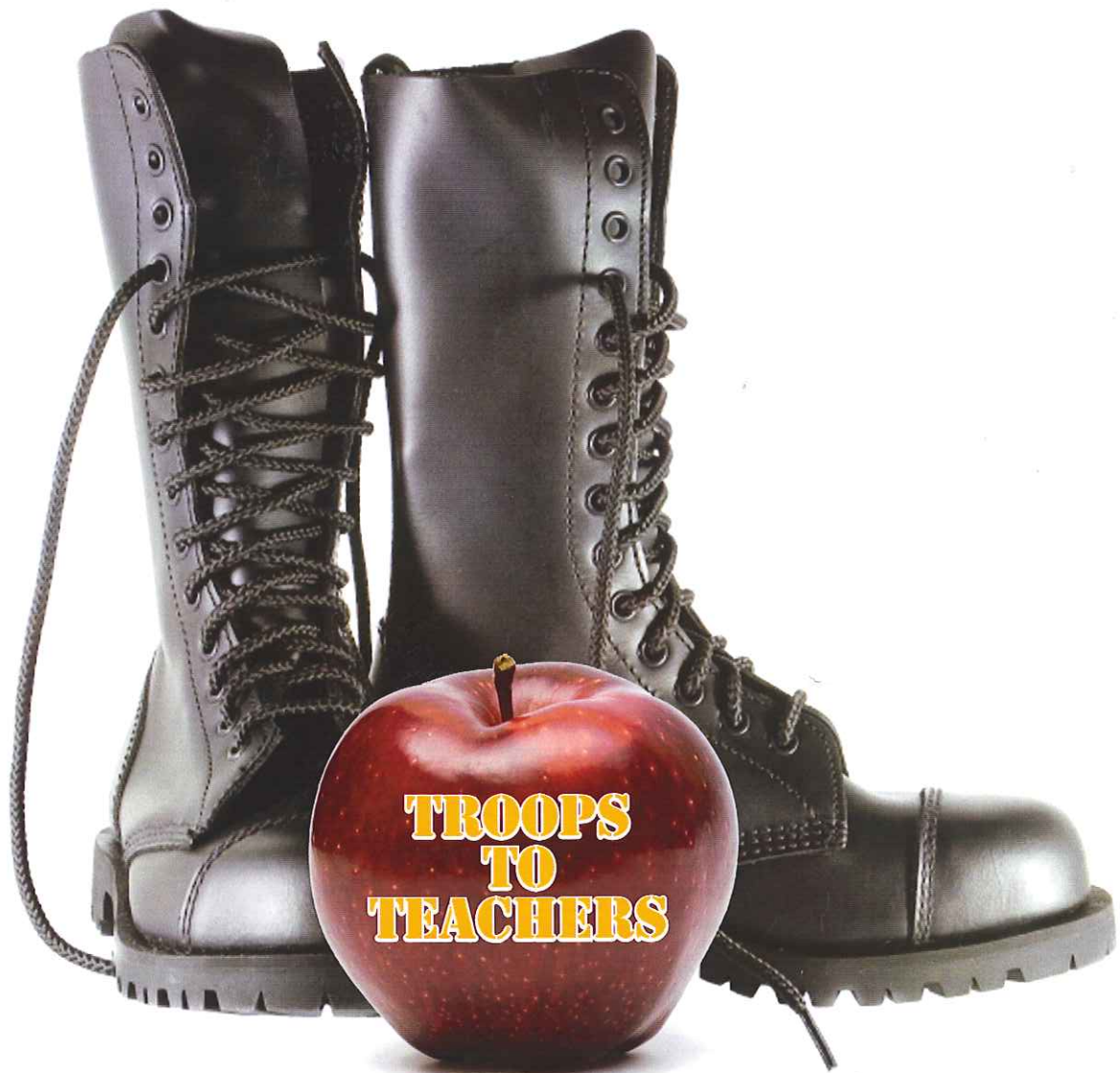


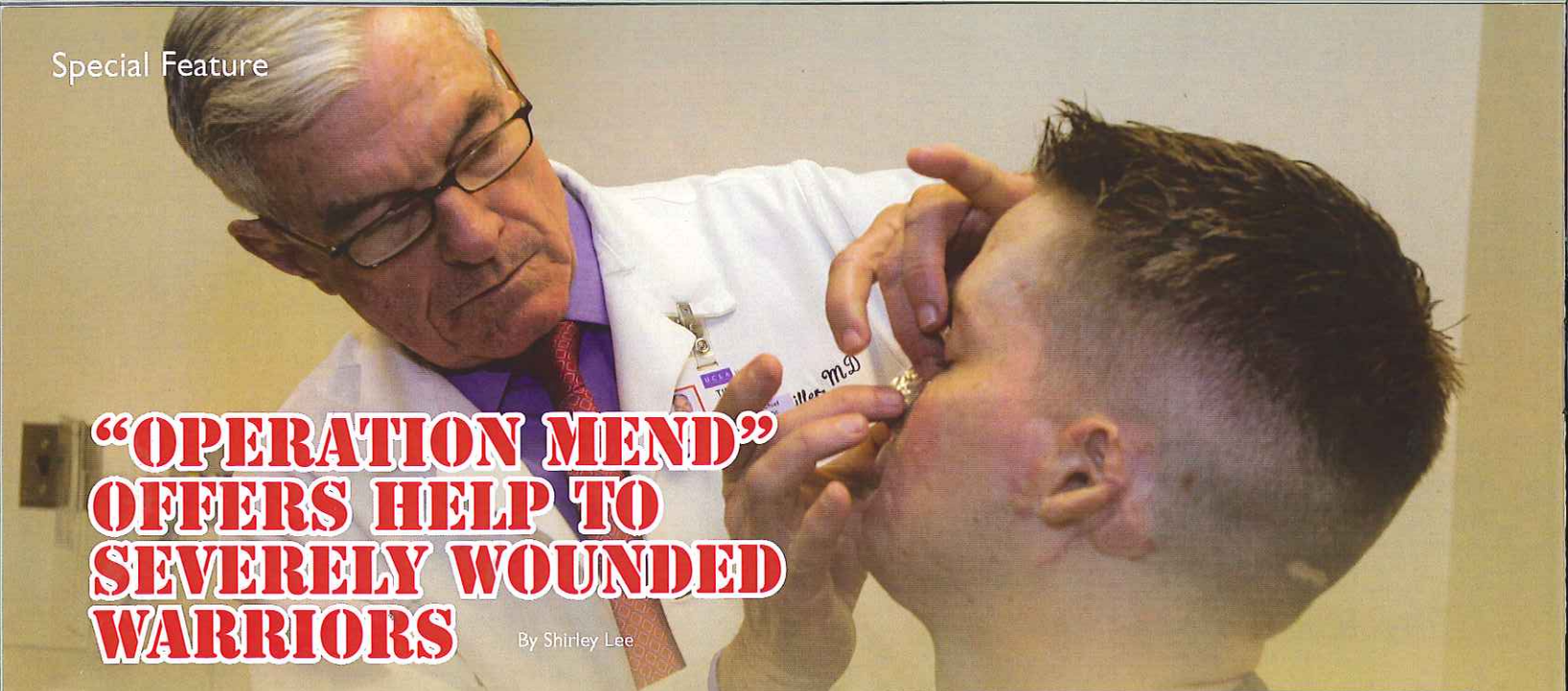
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“OPERATION MEND” OFFERS HELP TO SEVERELY WOUNDED WARRIORS

By Shirley Lee

“Operation Mend” is a project that offers hope and healing to members of the U.S. military personnel severely wounded during service in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is a partnership that has been established between Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas and UCLA Medical Center in Southern California.

According to Mr. Amir Rubin, Chief Operating Officer for the UCLA Hospital System, “Mr. Ron Katz, who is a well known inventor and philanthropist and a member of our Board of Advisors, first suggested the idea. It occurred to him that wounded warriors who suffered disfiguring facial injuries could profit from a collaboration of the two medical centers.

“Brooke is a leading Army burn, trauma, and rehabilitation center that is outstanding in what they do, and UCLA Medical Center, ranked among the top three hospitals in the United States, has a lot of specialists such as are available in very few places across the country. Of course we wanted to help our wounded military members who have done so much for us, so we went down to Brooke and met with its Commander, Brigadier General James Gilman, and talked it over.”

Mr. Katz tells us that, since his family has a part in sponsoring the Fisher House -- which supplies lodging for the relatives of patients at Brooke Medical Center -- they had occasion to attend its opening ceremony, which included a parade featuring the military members who were patients there at that time.

“We were shocked by the tremendous number of service members who were suffering from devastating facial disfigurements. And we had also seen a CNN piece about Aaron Mankin, a 25-year-old U.S. Marine Corporal who had been injured by an improvised explosive device in Iraq. He had sustained burns over 25 percent of his body and his face was seriously disfigured. As a result of those two experiences, we wanted to do something to help find a remedy.

“I knew of the extraordinary capabilities of our plastic surgery team at UCLA and I thought that we might be able to be helpful to the people who needed that care, if we could arrange it with Brooke Medical Center. The plan was that when they believed one of their patients could use our services, they could make such a referral. General Gilman agreed with us. He’s a great American, who wants to make sure that our wounded warriors have not only the best that the military can offer, but the best that the private sector has to offer as well.”

The chief of reconstructive and plastic surgery at UCLA Medical Center is Dr. Timothy Miller, who is also a military veteran.

“We are able to provide most of the things that these patients need right here at Brooke Medical Center,” General Gilman explains. “But there are a few things that require really complex reconstructive facial surgery. The Army and the Department of Defense do not have lots of experts in that field, so we cannot offer the expertise that is supplied by Dr. Miller and his partners at UCLA.

“When badly hurt and badly burned military people first come back, they have more important things to worry about than what they’re going to look like. Then, after the life-threatening injuries have been taken care of, there comes a point when they need something we are not able to supply, which is the surgery that will return their facial features to as much normalcy as possible. That is when it’s time to arrange for them to go out and talk with Dr. Miller.”

Aaron Mankin was the very first to benefit from this unique partnership.

The husband of Marine Lance Corporal Diana Mankin, and father of their baby daughter, Madeline Paige, has already undergone several reconstructive surgeries that are vastly improving his condition.

Today there are others receiving similar help as well.

Patients arriving to be evaluated and treated receive warm welcomes by the UCLA staff.

When news of UCLA’s involvement in the project became known, UCLA clinical nurse specialist and former U.S. Army nurse Priscilla “Patti” Taylor led a community group of military veterans in creating several “quilts of valor” to be presented to the arriving warriors – a military tradition.

“Our military personnel have done so much to defend our country that we, as a nation, need to take the best of our military resources and the best of our civilian resources and do the best that we can for them. We consider it an honor and a privilege to be of assistance,” says Mr. Rubin.

“A portion of the care is funded by the military, but there is some portion of the reconstructive surgical care that is not funded,” he continues. “That includes things like the transportation, lodging, and coordination. We allow patients to bring their families out and we have tour coordinators who track their process and take them to appointments throughout their stay. We match them up with a volunteer “buddy” family from the community who will host them and – if they have their children along – might take them to Disneyland and things like that.”

The Katz Family Foundation and other volunteer contributors fund all uncovered costs associated with this project, which includes lodging patients and family members at UCLA’s Tiverton House, a hotel on the hospital campus designed to meet the needs of patients receiving treatment at UCLA Medical Center.

It is hoped that Operation Mend will serve as a model for other medical institutions interested in helping additional wounded service members.

Persons who would like to contribute to the Operation Mend program may visit <https://giving.ucla.edu/plasticsurgery> or contact Adrienne Walt, Director of Development, UCLA Medical Sciences, awalt@support.ucla.edu, (310-267-1835).