

Operation Mend founder receives 'Strength of the Nation' Award

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By J. Elise Van Pool



Photo Credit: Juan R. Tricoche.

The U.S. Army Drill Team performs at the Army's Birthday Ball Saturday evening.

ARLINGTON, Va. (Army News Service, June 14, 2010) -- The founder of a program providing reconstructive surgery to warriors wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan received the "Strength of the Nation" Award Saturday at the Army Birthday Ball in National Harbor, Md.

Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. and Secretary of the Army John McHugh presented the public-service award to Ronald Katz for "Operation Mend." Katz founded the program as an innovative partnership between UCLA Medical Center and Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

"So far Operation Mend has helped almost 40 men and women, restoring confidence and helping to restore resilience in our wounded warriors," Casey said.

Operation Mend began in 2007, when Katz saw a news piece about Soldiers whose faces had been severely disfigured after surviving improvised explosive devices in Iraq and Afghanistan. The program brings wounded warriors to UCLA Medical Center to receive reconstructive surgery from the top plastic surgeons in the country. Since 2007, the program has helped 38

men and women receive surgery to repair their facial wounds.

The program also funds travel and lodging for the warriors and their family. While in Los Angeles, the warriors and their family are paired up with host families to help them navigate the city and have a touch of home.

In 2008, Operation Mend sponsored a blue-ribbon symposium on post traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injury to further the understanding of doctors treating them.

Recommendations from this symposium have become policy in Iraq and Afghanistan to help prevent these conditions.

"I am very appreciative of this award," said Katz, "but I would like to dedicate it to the extraordinary and courageous men and women we serve in Operation Mend, as well as the doctors, staff and volunteers."

"Since 2007, we have had almost 40 patients enroll in Operation Mend," Katz continued. "The results are wonderful. In most cases hope exists, where none existed before."

The Strength of the Nation Award is presented to an individual who engages in exemplary public service that makes a substantial contribution in completing the Army's mission. Katz is the third recipient of the award since its creation in 2007.

For more information on Operation Mend please visit their website at **<http://operationmend.ucla.edu>**.

For more information about the Army's 235th Birthday please visit **www.Army.mil/Birthday**.

(J. Elise Van Pool serves as a public affairs specialist for the Army's Office of the Chief, Public Affairs.)