

News

LINDEN MAN TO BE IN N.Y. PARADE

By **Lori Gilbert**
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Jose Jauregui never celebrated Veterans Day.

It was just another day off from school to him.

On Monday, though, the 28-year-old will celebrate the commemoration of veterans in the country's biggest parade.

Jauregui will join others from Operation Mend and march down Fifth Avenue in New York City for the America's Parade.

"I always wanted to go to New York, but it never dawned on me it would happen," Jauregui said. "It worked out pretty well, I think."

The Linden High School graduate paid a steep price for the honor, though.

Jauregui, who enlisted in the U.S. Army as soon as he turned 18 in 2003, was injured in Ramadi, Iraq, in 2005 when his tank was hit by a rocket.

"There were four of us, and I was the only one who survived," Juaregui said. "We were all outside the tank getting shot at. We were going to get back in and start shooting. I was the first to get inside. I jumped in, and then we got hit."

The others never made it inside. Even though Jaregui did, he suffered burns over 75 percent of his body and lost part of his left hand.

He spent about two years being treated in San Antonio at the Brooke Army Medical Center, which is a leading burn center in the country.

He returned to Stockton and was undergoing further treatment at the Veterans Affairs Hospital in Palo Alto when a friend saw an advertisement on television about Operation Mend seeking donations of cars.

The organization is a joint venture between Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles, the Brooke Army Medical Center and the Veterans Affairs-Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System and provides reconstructive surgery and medical services to service members wounded in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Jauregui contacted Operation Mend and over the past 18 months has undergone five reconstructive surgeries. A week ago he had work done on his neck and mouth, he said, and had previously had his nose repaired, his eyelids worked on and, most significantly, regained some use of his hands.

Jauregui said he is grateful for the treatment at UCLA.

Now it's his turn to feel some gratitude for his sacrifice, and the America's Parade is intended to do just that.

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