

RAGMAG



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**The
Ragnar
Relay
Series**



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**53535
PG.10**



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HAPPENINGS**
*Exchanges are
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PG.8

RUNNER SPOTLIGHT

Runners Assemble



TEAM 47: Operation Giveback

RUNNING IS A STRANGE ENDEAVOR

To friends and family members, co-workers and acquaintances that do not run, their running friends might appear slightly “off.” After all, we give up our early mornings to punish ourselves, while others sleep in. We’re out in the heat or the cold; running at odd hours and keeping track of our progress diligently. At first glance – it can even appear selfish. After all, most of us are not winning races, collecting cash from sponsor endorsements or even basking in the glow like celebrities. But, when you look a little closer, you often find runners, even teams that are running to Give Back.

That’s exactly what Team Captain Retired US Army Command Sergeant Major (CSM), and Operation Giveback Founder Jose Garcia-Aponte and his teammates on Team Operation Giveback are doing. They may be logging miles and getting in shape. But, they have a bigger goal in mind. Their team consists of a mix of Wounded Warriors; Retired and Active Duty Military, and a Military Widow. Their mission is to raise awareness and resources in order to buy Christmas gifts for kids of our Fallen Heroes and do their best to bring some smiles back to some of the orphans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. And, it isn’t their first shot at it.

“Thanks to both Leslie from Ragnar Relay Tennessee, and Carrie from Ragnar Relay Florida Keys, we were able to motivate and inspire many other people who saw our Wounded Warriors taking on the challenge with excitement. Some of our Heroes are missing limbs and all are facing a daily battle with PTSD but you’d never know it. Now, Kent from Ragnar has opened his door to us to participate in the Ragnar Washington DC. I use such events in order to connect, share, and serve.” – Jose Garcia-Aponte.

Jose and his wife Maribel work hard to help others in need. Their philosophy is that “no one person reaches the top by himself or herself, but it is rather a collection of efforts, ideas and thoughts that bring any worthwhile endeavor to fruition.” Perhaps that is why Ragnar seemed like the perfect mix of challenge and teamwork for their cause. Running 200 miles is intense. But no one faces it alone.

Operation Giveback reaches out to those in need. And, at the Ragnar Washington DC, one of their teammates, Veronica Ortiz, is paying it forward. Veronica, a USMC Gold Star Widow and one of Operation Giveback’s Christmas 2011 beneficiaries will be running, supporting her teammates and inspiring

others to help. Her husband, USMC Staff Sergeant Javier Ortiz Rivera, was killed in action on November 16, 2010.

Teammate Lance corporal Lyndon Ortiz, a proud supporter of Operation Giveback, The Wounded Warrior Project, Fairways for Warriors and The Mission Continues is also a proud member of this Ragnar Team. Ortiz fulfilled his lifelong dream and headed to Marine Corps Basic Training just weeks after attending his high school graduation. In 2005, he was part of a Quick Reaction Force sent to rescue Marines who had been hit by IEDs. In route to their rescue, his vehicle was hit by an IED and he was badly injured. Enduring reconstructive surgeries and working through a traumatic brain injury and hearing loss, he had a tough road to recovery. After completing the Ragnar Relay Washington DC, he intends to continue helping those in need, volunteering at Heavenly Hoofs equine therapy for disabled children. He is pursuing a degree in Social Work and will continue to work with veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Sergeant Noe’ Santos Dilone (Or Lito, as he is known) is another retired military member on this team. Noe’ was deployed to Iraq in



2005. While leading a convoy, Noe' was injured when three IEDs went off and hit his lead vehicle. As a result of the attack, Noe' ultimately had his left leg amputated at the hip. Not allowing this to limit his abilities, Noe' will continue to push himself and his teammates this September before returning home and completing his education in the Recording Arts. He is a proud supporter of Operation Giveback.

Team member Staff Sergeant William Castillo enlisted in the military after the September 11th attacks on America. He served a mission through 2005, but was deployed again to Iraq in 2007 in support of the same mission. Suffering a violent attack while aiding his fellow Marines, Castillo was severely injured. Taking multiple rounds and losing his left leg during the attack, his road to recovery was also extremely daunting. He spent almost 2 years in physical therapy relearning how to walk and making progress every day. Awarded the Purple Heart, the Army Commendation Medal with Valor and being nominated for the Bronze Star, Castillo has dedicated himself to helping other soldiers wounded from the war. His continuing efforts to help others in the face of overwhelming personal odds has inspired his teammates and touched the lives of others in need.



Sergeant First Class Manuel Colon was deployed to Afghanistan in 2004. While deployed, Manuel suffered numerous attacks. However, he refused to leave his fellow soldiers behind. It was not until he returned home that he realized he had a long recovery ahead of him due to a mild traumatic brain injury, post traumatic stress and follicular lymphoma. He is currently still serving as an active duty member of the United States Army as he awaits his medical evaluations. He has been awarded a Bronze Star Medal, a Meritorious Service Medal, six Army Commendation Medals, four Army Achievement Medals and six Conduct Medals.

Staff Sergeant Christopher Gordon is not just a hero to his fellow servicemen and women. The person looking up to him the most is his young son who stood by his side as he recovered back at home following a violent attack in Northern Iraq. Chris is grateful for everyday he faces as he recovers with the support of his family, including his young son who thinks it's pretty cool to have a dad with a "robot leg." Staying involved in numerous organizations like the Wounded Warrior Project and Operation Giveback has given him a new way to build relationships and learn about the important rights that our wounded servicemen and women are

entitled to. This newfound sense of purpose has benefited his recovery and set him on a new path as he works to become stronger and earn his bachelor's degree in Information Technology.

When you see Jose and his team on the course, be sure to thank them for their service as well as their continuing efforts to enrich the lives of those in need. Stand beside them, offer a drink of water or a high five. And, remember that sacrificing your time for a run can make a difference in someone's life – including your own.

OGB Mission Statement:

To Raise awareness and resources for our Wounded Warriors, their families and the children of our FALLEN HEROES.

If you would like to help, please visit the following link for donations:

<http://www.operation-giveback.com/donate/>