

Patriot Foundation Marks Success

By [John Chappell](#)

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Once again the Patriot Foundation capped its 10th annual fundraising golf weekend with a celebratory banquet, handing out hundreds of thousands of dollars to help military families placed in need by the death or injury of a soldier.

The foundation, headed by Chuck Deleot, a local retired Navy captain, raises money every year to help military families devastated by wartime loss. The money



General David Rodriguez addressing the audience at the annual Patriot Foundation dinner Saturday night at National Golf Club. Photo by [John Chappell](#).

goes to a number of different charitable organizations.

The ballroom crowd Saturday night at the National Golf Club was dotted with uniforms, many bearing the stars of general officers, and included U.S. Sen. Richard Burr, a ranking member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. Many a dress uniform sleeve

bore row upon row of gold lines, each for six months combat deployment.

Deleot welcomed everyone to an evening opened by the 18th Airborne Chorus marching in to lead off, as always, with "Glory, Glory What a Helluva Way to Die." Each one of these soldiers is not only a singer in the chorus, but a fully trained paratrooper serving in the division. They brought the crowd to repeated rounds of applause and finally to a standing ovation with a series of patriotic songs from a medley of service melodies to "An American Soldier" before marching out.

Deleot wanted to pay particular homage to one local man whose idea gave rise to the notion of an organization dedicated to helping the families of the nation's warriors.

"Spike Smith founded the Patriot Foundation in 2003," Deleot said afterward. "He invited me and a few other people to his house in 2003 to explore how we could help the troops. I got involved because of Spike. He ran the foundation 2003 to 2006 with me as his deputy. I have run it the last six years, with Spike as our treasurer."

This year's checks included:

- n \$140,000 to the Airborne Scholarship Association to take care of children of 18th Airborne Corps soldiers;
- n \$50,000 to help Fort Bragg wounded soldiers;
- n \$210,000 for the families of soldiers who lost their lives;
- n \$75,000 to the All-American Strategic Response Force for children of the 82nd Airborne Division;
- n \$75,000 for the children of Special Operation Command (USASOC) soldiers via the USASOC Family and Command Support Association; and
- n \$30,000 to the Navy SEAL Foundation for support of the air crew of a helicopter that went down in Afghanistan.

"We already supported the SEALs," Deleot said. "It is always a push upward. It is not the easiest time to raise money, and the fact that we raised \$580,000 so far this year is an accomplishment."

In addition to Smith and Deleot, the foundation board includes Mike Girimont, Gene Ward and Stan Bradshaw. Four retired generals serve as advisors: Gen. Buck Kernan, Dan McNeill, Lance Smith and Maj. Gen. Chuck Swannack.

The honoree and keynote speaker this year was Gen. David M. Rodriguez, the 19th commander of the Army Forces Command. Commissioned in 1976 as a West Point graduate, the general commanded the international force in Afghanistan before coming to Fort Bragg. His extensive combat experience includes service in Desert Shield and Desert Storm as well as multiple tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Rodriguez began by thanking the Patriot Foundation for its decade helping soldiers and their families.

"I am honored to accept this award on behalf of the patriots who have given their lives, who were severely wounded and those deployed tonight," the general said. "You have raised more than \$1.8 million to assist families of fallen, wounded and injured soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines - and done so in a time of fiscal constraint and economic uncertainty. You expect to raise an additional one million dollars this year alone and use that money to help more than 400 families."

Rodriguez introduced as one example of Patriot Foundation impact an Army widow, Wesley Bauguess, herself a veteran. She devoted herself to helping others after her husband, Maj. Larry Bauguess, was killed in combat.

"Following Maj. Bauguess' death, Wesley remained strong for their children, Ryann and Ellie," he said. "The Bauguess family is committed to the memory of a

loving husband and father and share the same values of patriotism and service their father lived every day of his life. She established the Wounded Warrior Committee, a group of volunteers who create special care packages for hospitalized paratroopers from Fort Bragg's 82nd Airborne Division.

"In return, the Fort Bragg community gave back to the Bauguess family," Rodriguez said. "Ryann and Ellie have been receiving Patriot Foundation scholarship awards since 2008 toward their future education. This is a great way to honor Maj. Bauguess' sacrifice, providing for the future educational needs of his children."

Rodriguez spoke of the more than 6,500 who lost their lives in service in the 11 years of a protracted war where over 2.2 million service members deployed in support of various operations around the world.

"More than 49,000 came home with physical wounds of war," he said. "Many more are suffering the invisible wounds of war. This is a tremendous cost to the military and the nation, but our nation will continue to demand much of our military."

The Army is planning for a reduced defense budget, working to meet a requirement to reduce end strength from 520,000 soldiers to 490,000 by fiscal year 2017.

"I want to assure you that we will maintain the quality of the all-volunteer force as we reduce our numbers," Rodriguez said. "We will also work to ensure our soldiers can more easily transition from the ranks of America's Army to the ranks of American veterans."

The United States faces tremendous challenges. Close to 3 million veterans cannot find work. The Army is developing a program - "Soldier for Life" - to ensure access to health care, educational opportunity and meaningful employment.

"As we shrink the size of the Army, we are taking a hard look at who we will retain from the career ranks to ensure we have a quality Army," he said. "We are also applying this rigor to our recruitment program. This is a challenge, because the pool of eligible recruits has greatly diminished."

He thanked the foundation for helping thousands of military families across the nation.

"Thanks for helping us care for America's Army," Rodriguez said in closing. "Its soldiers and families are stronger for what you have done and continue to do for them, for helping us care for our wounded, ill and injured soldiers and honor those we have lost."

For more information or to make a contribution, write to Patriot Foundation, P.O. Box 5069, Pinehurst, NC 28374 (or www.patriotscholarships.com).