



2014 USO Annual Report

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Letter from USO CEO & President

J.D. Crouch II, CEO & President



"I'm proud of what USO staff and volunteers accomplish around the world every single day and I am thankful for the generous support of our donors and partners who help make this all happen."

The key to the USO's enduring success is our ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment. We strive to stay ahead of the curve by delivering the support and programs that are relevant to our troops and military families when they need it.

Effectively delivering our programs at the field level – where our customers are – differentiates the USO from every other military support organization. Our agility and reach ensure that we're always improving what works, and changing or discarding programs that have outlived their usefulness. This requires discipline, flexibility and focus. The USO staff and tens of thousands of volunteers around the world bring that in abundance.

And as needs evolve, we will continue to reimagine our programs so they will matter and make a real impact on our troops, wherever they serve – from Kandahar to Korea to Kansas. For the past 6 years your USO has surveyed our customers to confirm that we continue to hit the mark. While we're proud of our outstanding customer reviews, we will continue to ensure that we pay close attention to everything troops and their families tell us and make the adjustments that are important to them.

As troops return home, we will strengthen activities aimed at making their transition to civilian life a success. It's not just a good thing to do – it's essential to sustaining our superb all-volunteer military. Every one of us has the responsibility to make sure these men and women are successful veterans. They deserve it and our communities across the nation will benefit from it. Also, as our troops make the transition back to civilian life, this will help make certain that future generations volunteer to meet the country's critical defense needs.

I'm proud of what USO staff and volunteers accomplish around the world every single day and I am thankful for the generous support of our donors and partners who help make this all happen. They show me what it means to have a generous spirit, and to care about those who trust us to be there for them – even if for just a few moments while they wait for a flight home.

That's why I'm proud to be associated with the USO – our national treasure.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "J.D. Crouch II".

ALWAYS BY THEIR SIDE

More than 13 years of military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan have fundamentally transformed the nature of America’s military and its families. More women and families serve, the number of deployments and activations of Guard and Reserve units has fluctuated greatly, and the expeditionary nature of conflict often contributes to stress and uncertainty during service. On top of this, it is anticipated that more than 200,000 troops will transition out of the Armed Services each year over the next 5 years. These dramatic changes in our military call for innovative responses from those who support them.

As it has for 74 years, the USO continuously adapts to meet the changing needs of our troops and families, transforming our programs and services so that they continue to provide excellent support to our nation’s military and their families as their journeys change. In 2015, the USO will continue to deliver core services at our centers, which were visited more than 7 million times last year. That’s in addition to the entertainment and expeditionary services we provide for deployed troops around the world.

Moving forward, we will be deepening our investment in impactful programs that assist troops and their families in their important transition back into civilian life. With the *USO Transition 360 Alliance* launch in 2015, we will scale up programs in the areas of employment, community reintegration and family strengthening – areas that have proven impact in building resilience in America’s military and their families.

The USO is uniquely positioned as a bridge that connects Americans with their military and with military families through program delivery, engagement, donations and volunteering. The USO is able to deliver support where our troops and families need it most because of the generosity of our donors, corporate supporters, volunteers and partners. And these contributions have made a real and positive difference in our troops’ lives that are felt not just today, but will be remembered for many years after their service.

Our mission remains strong and we’re excited to continue our unwavering support to the great service men and women and their families for many years to come. Thank you for being a part of our mission and helping us remain *Always by their side.*

USO CORE SERVICES

At the heart of the USO are its centers, entertainment tours and several key programs supporting our troops and families. As the needs of our military change, so will our programmatic offerings. We evaluate and measure each one to determine its overall value and positive impact on the communities we're serving. Sometimes the actual program itself only provides a glimpse of the overall difference we are making. When we receive stories and emails of thanks from troops and their families – even years after the experience – we know what we're doing is working. Based on their positive feedback, we will continue to scale up effective programs even more in the years to come.





"While deployed, the USO has been the force that has helped me drive on in hard times. Giving not only a phone or computer to use to call home but a couch to sleep on, a TV to watch the games on, or a theater to watch a movie on. Thank you to all the USO employees that have sacrificed their time for me and my fellow soldiers."

- VETERAN (TELLUSO SURVEY)

GLOBAL NETWORK OF CENTERS

Most Americans in uniform know about the USO because they come to USO centers, looking for a break in their routine and seeking that "home-away-from-home" feeling. At more than 160 locations around the world, including four fully operational centers in Afghanistan, the USO is at the heart of the mission to support our troops. We are a bridge that connects our troops to their loved ones back home and to the American people. At USO centers, our private, satellite-based communications network provides free phone calls and Internet connectivity. Sometimes those lines help create life-changing moments.

Marine Capt. Nick Whitefield was about halfway through his deployment at Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, when he got word that his wife had gone into labor, and he discovered one of the greatest benefits of Operation Phone Home.

"I was a mess," he said. "I ran to the

USO, banged on the door and said, 'My wife's about to have a baby!'"

He was taken to a room at the USO with a computer and a video connection back home. "I got connected with one of my wife's friends in the delivery room, and before I knew it, there was my wife (Laura) and family members getting ready for the birth of our son, Ethan."

Whitefield remained connected through the whole process, from the birth to the weighing of his 7-pound son.

He was also able to talk to Laura to make sure she was doing well in recovery.

"None of this would have been possible without the services of the USO. They even gave me a onesie that said, 'I met my dad at the USO.'"

Operation Phone Home is about more than video connections, though. Our private telephone network provides 13 million minutes

of free telephone calls and email connections to loved ones around the globe. We also provided nearly 50,000 free international calling cards in locations without access to the network. Troops in Afghanistan, Kuwait, the Philippines, Cuba, Africa and the Bahamas used calling cards distributed by the USO in 2014.

USO centers have evolved over the years, but each of them provides our troops a safe, secure place to relax. Today, our locations at military bases, airports and hospitals are visited millions of times each year and continue to play vital roles in their military communities. We go where our troops and their families need us.

The opening of the USO's second Warrior and Family Center at Naval Support Activity Bethesda, Maryland, home of the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, made life a lot better for the troops recovering there. This world-class 16,000-square-foot facility provides a comfortable

place for troops receiving care at the hospital to reconnect with their families and serves as a refuge.

"This is a worry-free zone," said then-Army Sgt. Kevin Gaston, who was recovering from serious wounds he sustained in Afghanistan. "You can cook food if you want to. You can watch movies, sit back and relax and work on yourself on a personal level."

The troops rely on the center to be the heart of their community. "[The USO center] contributes to healing without requiring a medical appointment," said Navy Capt. David Bitonti. "It fits perfectly in the total healing aspect of our campus. While they're here, this center is their hometown."

When troops deploy, their families might be left behind, but they are never alone, thanks to the USO. Our family-friendly programs offered at USO centers include family meals, movie nights, family fun days and other activities that engage family

members of all ages and deliver the support and comfort they need.

Today, we're looking at locations around the world where we

can do more. The USO will be opening new centers across the U.S. and around the world, reaching more troops and military families wherever they serve.

VOLUNTEERS AT THE READY

What makes our USO centers tick? Why do they run so efficiently?

The answer is simple: 30,000 volunteers serving across the U.S. and around the world, delivering your promise of support. It's not hard to imagine that most of the millions of visitors to our centers each year deal exclusively with our loyal and hardworking volunteers. These volunteers represent the support of the American people. They're there because they want to be, and they give us their most precious gift - their time.

A daily routine for a USO volunteer is anything but routine. Yet, no matter what situation they encounter at a center, they always seem to find the right solution. They are there to help give back to troops and military families, and the difference they make is immeasurable for the thousands of troops they see every day. We know that what they do is exemplary. Yet, they think it's ordinary. They're glad to do it and their daily payment comes in the form of hugs, handshakes and expressions of gratitude.

LIFE-CHANGING ENTERTAINMENT

When entertainers travel to bases around the world on behalf of the USO, our troops and their families express immense appreciation. The troops value these celebrity interactions and are grateful to the stars for taking time to come visit them, no matter where they're serving. The USO's tradition of delivering top-level entertainment continued in great form in 2014, with 102 entertainers making lives a bit brighter for more than 289,000 troops and military family members by performing at 440 events in the U.S. and 17 foreign countries.

The longest-running USO tour, featuring Sesame Workshop characters, reached a milestone in October when Elmo, Cookie



Monster and their friends put on a show at Fort Benning, Georgia. Somewhere in the crowd was the 500,000th military family member who attended *The Sesame Street/USO Experience for Military Families*.

The tour, which began in July 2008, has brought laughter and support to the families of deployed troops with programs that address their unique concerns.

TODAY® MAKES A DIFFERENCE

You might not need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows, but it's great to have a weatherman, and some outstanding talent, bring some sunshine to troops stationed in Afghanistan. "TODAY" weatherman Al Roker and comedian Jay Leno led a troupe to Afghanistan as part of the "TODAY" Shine a Light initiative. Kevin Eubanks, Iliza Shlesinger and Craig Robinson joined them as they brightened the lives of thousands of troops from the moment they stepped off the plane at Bagram Airfield. The tour featured daily segments for "TODAY" and hundreds of laughs for the troops.

"The idea that you can put a smile on their face ... that's why you're doing it," Roker said. "Their face lights up, and you're like, 'Wow, I am making

a difference for these people.'"

After completing his USO tour, Al Roker continued his pledge to support the troops as he set a new Guinness World Record when he hosted the longest uninterrupted live weather report broadcast and raised donations through a CrowdRise page, which were dedicated to the USO.

Leno shared his tour experience with viewers, reminding them of one very important fact.

"Many people don't know the USO isn't part of the government," Leno said, explaining to his viewers that without their support, the USO couldn't do its work.





RECORD-BREAKING USO MOMENTS

Country music sensation Hunter Hayes took his support for the USO's *Every Moment Counts* campaign on the road as he entertained troops from Virginia to Europe. Hayes entertained thousands of troops and family members during his USO performances with stops in Norfolk, Virginia, New York City, Nashville, Tennessee, and RAF Mildenhall in Great Britain.

"I'm excited to join the USO in making every moment count for our unbelievable men and women in uniform," he said.

Hayes joined country star Kellie Pickler, singer Jason Derulo, actor Dennis Haysbert and several other

key celebrities in promoting the *Every Moment Counts* campaign to remind Americans that their continued support for troops and military families makes our country stronger.

And when called into action, more than 115,000 people signed the *Every Moment Counts* flag. Supporters around the world helped establish a Guinness World Record for most signatures on a flag, when they added their names to show support for troops and military families. The flag was unveiled Sept. 11, at the Great American Ballpark in Cincinnati, with more than 40,000 fans gathered to watch the Cincinnati Reds play the St. Louis Cardinals.

USO EXPEDITIONARY SUPPORT

What happens when there isn't a USO center nearby? We reach out to troops in remote and lonely outposts through our USO2GO program.

Since 2008, USO2GO shipments have lifted the spirits of troops in remote locations from Iraq and Afghanistan to the Philippines, Northwest Africa and Djibouti. From laptop computers and electronic games to snacks and sports gear, these shipments of pure goodness

let service members in some of the most austere locations on Earth know Americans support them.

So, when the call for a USO2GO shipment came from troops at Camp Buchanan, Liberia, your USO responded. Snacks, toiletries and electronic games arrived in time for the holidays.

Army Staff Sgt. Randall Winsett, a chaplain's assistant at Camp

Buchanan, said conditions in the rustic camp were taking a toll on the troops. "This is the first deployment for many of the soldiers here," he said. "When the USO2GO items arrived, more soldiers came out of their living quarters and started acting more like a community during their limited downtime."

Of course, the gaming systems were popular, but Winsett also said that

the simple things – toiletries and cups of coffee – also filled a void.

"Drinking coffee from a Dunkin' Donuts cup brings me back home, away from the chaos of our daily operations," he said.

In 2014, there were 89 USO2GO shipments, bringing the program total to more than 1,440 deliveries around the world in less than a decade.

CREATING HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Being away from loved ones is not easy, especially during the holidays. But the USO is there for our troops who want that special touch of home to celebrate with their friends out in the field. We distribute USO Holiday Boxes four times a year to remote forward operating bases. These deliveries – all designed to bring holiday cheer to troops far from large bases – include items recommended by troops in the field, like decorations, games, snacks, movies and holiday-themed items. Providing these unique holiday packages can make all the difference in the world.



In 2014, **170** USO Holiday Boxes were shipped, supporting more than **14,000** troops at **115** remote locations.

"The items in the [holiday] box went over really well with the troops here. It really boosted the spirits of the guys, especially after the holidays. I would like to thank you for all the hard work and dedication to helping make life for us over here a little better. We are located in a [forward operating base] that does not have a lot of amenities so these packages mean a lot to us." – STAFF SGT. ERIC J. PRICE, U.S. ARMY

WHERE THEY GO, WE CAN GO

Sometimes meeting the desires of troops at remote locations requires innovation. Our challenge was to find a way to deliver electronic gaming capability, make it possible for troops with almost no access to the outside world to watch videos, and make it all travel durable for when they needed to move locations quickly. Our answer was the Mobile Entertainment Gaming System – or MEGS. The system is built into a portable case and includes a digital TV, an XBOX console with the latest games and a selection of popular movies. The units can be set up and broken down in minutes and have provided hours of fun to troops at remote bases, on ships at sea and even some

stateside locations. We anticipated delivering 50 MEGS in 2014, but demand for the system drove that number up to 92. More than 11,500 troops – mostly in Afghanistan and Kuwait – used the system. MEGS were also deployed to Africa, the Philippines and U.S. Embassies.

“I can’t thank you enough for your generosity and heart for soldiers. There have already been lines of troops waiting to play XBOX! You guys ... are a blessing beyond belief,” a chaplain said in an email thanking the USO.

Demand for MEGS continues to grow. We will be upgrading the XBOX operating system and expanding distribution in 2015.



QUICK TO REACT

When a crisis surfaces somewhere in the world, our troops are often called upon to respond. From earthquakes and tsunamis to disease outbreaks, the U.S. military is often the first on the ground, and the USO is always quick to react to their needs. That was certainly true when it came to the military’s response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa. American troops acted to improve the medical response, and the USO stepped up to support the troops. We moved private telephone network equipment to Liberia so troops could call concerned family members at home. MEGS, USO2GO shipments and Holiday Boxes arrived as soon as troops could accept them. While our troops’ actions keep people around

the world safe, your actions let them know America is thinking of them.

And when America responded to support our allies in the Baltics, our troops were once again assigned to locations we had not anticipated. As they deployed, USO operations in Europe began supplying morale-lifting support, continuing a tradition that keeps you – and the USO – always by their side.



USO TRANSITION PROGRAMS

The USO's Transition Support has evolved because of changes in the military. With our broad access and knowledge of the military, the USO is well placed to assist our nation's troops and their families with the programs that help them successfully transition to their next careers and new communities. The USO is expanding the scope and scale of its programming to assist troops and families transitioning out of the service during the critical 18 months before and 18 months after separation.

*More than **200,000** troops will transition out of the military each year over the next 5 years.*



BEING THERE FOR WHAT'S NEXT

Life for our troops and military families is one of constant change, and no transition is more of a challenge than leaving the service. After even a few years of predictable routine, making the adjustment to civilian life can be daunting.

What's next? Probably finding a job or starting a career.

For years, troops have known exactly where they were supposed to be and what they were supposed to be doing. Even wardrobes weren't debatable. But becoming a civilian involves a new set of rules. And making these transitions easier has been a growing priority for the USO. We explore and evaluate programs and services that help these troops and families move forward to the next stage of their lives. And

when we find the right ones that meet our military's goals, we put our full emphasis on expanding them and making a great impact.

USO/Hire Heroes USA Transition Workshops are one example. In our third year supporting the program, more than 1,300 service members, spouses and caregivers participated in 96 Transition Workshops. While small in size, each of the workshops provides attendees with the personal attention and support that makes a real difference to them as they prepare to face the next stage of their lives. Nearly 90 percent of the participants strongly agreed that they were more confident in their ability to represent themselves in a job interview, helping to make their transition more successful.

EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS

Sudheer Banala knew he'd have to master some new rules.

When he attended the USO/Hire Heroes USA Career Transition Workshop at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, his process began in earnest.

"Workshop instructors showed us real scenarios - the real situation in the civilian job market by sharing their experiences," Banala said. "That was fantastic."

Banala, who was injured while on active duty, worked with an adviser to refine his resume, learned how employers wanted to hear about his skill sets and participated in a mock interview with a local



hiring manager. This real-world experience helped him feel more confident in his ability to find work when he left the Army.

The two-day Transition Workshops are held around the country near

military bases and are often paired with USO Career Opportunity Days, where area employers conduct additional mock interviews that sometimes result in job offers.

"Workshop advisers helped us understand that it's not just your

resume," Banala said. "[It's also about] your personality and how to answer a particular question."

His experience paid off. Banala secured a job as a software test engineer.

CARING FOR THE CAREGIVERS

When a service member comes home injured or changed, it puts tremendous stress on the person responsible for their care. Scheduling medical appointments, administering medications and tending to injuries that take a long time to heal might be what we expect from those closest to us, but it also tests the patience of the strongest caregiver. USO Caregivers Conferences provide an opportunity to learn from experts, and they give caregivers a chance to talk about their own experiences and discover they aren't going through this experience alone. These sessions offer a lifeline to a group of people many of us don't think about enough.

It's a safe place where they can openly laugh, relax and refocus on themselves.

Many of the more than 80 caregivers who attended the USO Caregivers Conference in Colorado Springs, Colorado, didn't know what to expect. They probably also didn't know they were among the 1.1 million people caring for wounded, ill or injured veterans of the post-9/11 era. But they came together and shared their experiences, their problems and some laughs.

These conferences give caregivers a



chance to bond with and learn from each other. "[These caregivers] are absolutely vital to the recovery process," USO Executive Vice President John Pray said. "They give so much of themselves to lift the spirits of their loved ones."

Justin Larsen, a veteran who served in Afghanistan, provides support for his wife, Joy, a former soldier who suffers from a traumatic brain injury sustained during her deployment to Afghanistan. "Caregivers conferences help us see what other caregivers are facing," he said. "You're going to meet somebody who is going to give you that little tool that maybe you can use to help you get through another day."

The daylong USO Caregivers Conferences tackle subjects like intimacy, addressing challenging behavior, breaking communications barriers, preventing fatigue and recognizing signs that a loved one might be considering suicide.

And, maybe most important of all, they give hardworking caregivers a chance to focus on themselves.

USO FAMILY STRENGTHENING PROGRAMS

Today's military family continues to endure the changes presented by military life. The military family dynamic has also changed. More women are serving in the military and the number of married service members has increased. The USO's family strengthening programs are designed to alleviate stress on families because we know that a strong military needs strong families at home.

Today, there are **2.9 million** military family members and **1.8 million** military children, of which **30%** are between the **ages of 6 and 11**.



STRONGER MARRIAGE, STRONGER COMMUNITY

Marriages are often tested during military service, especially during frequent and lengthy deployments. For troops transitioning back home, even their return is liable to cause strain and stress on a spouse or the entire family. Often, the issues center on an inability to communicate, understand and reconnect with their loved ones.

The USO wants to help keep military families strong. We work with Stronger Families to deliver Oxygen Seminars, which help military couples strengthen their relationships while working on tough issues in a fun and nonthreatening environment.

"We were losing hope in our relationship and I think this program gave us the spark and skill set to apply to our relationship. I also learned a lot about myself that I didn't realize. Basically, I need to focus on changing me and not focusing on trying to change him so much." – Anonymous Stronger Families Seminar Attendee

Last year, 40 Oxygen Seminars – including 11 designed for couples that had a wounded, ill or injured service member – were held across the country. This year, we plan to host 70 events as we scale this program up to meet demand.

WITH THEM ALL THE WAY

At the heart of every military family are the children who move around multiple times during their family's service. They face the challenge of finding friends, building relationships and gaining a sense of belonging – both in the family and at school – and when they struggle, the whole family is affected. The USO and Trevor Romain's Comfort Crew for Military Kids present the With You All The Way program, an initiative dedicated to supporting and connecting with military kids ages 4-16 about the challenges they face.



The program is hosted at schools and in the military communities to address these critical issues and provide these children with a support network that will help them adapt to this challenging lifestyle. At

"The USO's With You All The Way tour is a great example of how our community partnerships leverage our ability to foster resilient, healthy and confident military connected students."

– JASMINE MCLEOD, DODEA COORDINATOR FOR SCHOOL COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGY

each presentation, military students have the opportunity to open up about some of the hardships they face as military dependents,

including difficult topics such as bullying, deployment, reintegration and when a parent returns home with wounds – visible or invisible.

DRESSED FOR SUCCESS

A beautiful dress that earns you compliments all night long can be a dream come true for many young women – especially at their high school proms. Unfortunately, this dream can be expensive for military families on a tight budget. The USO hosts two Operation That's My Dress! events each year to provide these young women with the unique look they need to be a big hit at their big events. For more than five years, USO Operation That's My Dress! has provided military teens with the chance to enjoy an afternoon filled with glamour, pampering and fun while they shop for a formal dress to wear to homecoming, prom or other special occasions.

Teaming with renowned fashion designer Sherri Hill, who has donated nearly \$1 million in



dresses, the USO hosted events in Jacksonville, Florida, and in New York City in 2014, helping more than 700 military teens' dreams come true. Each participant was allowed to take one dress home for free. The success of Operation That's My Dress! has encouraged the USO to explore expanding the program to include service women and ways to support them for their milestone events and career needs.

USO SPECIAL DELIVERY

The challenges of becoming a new parent are on the minds of many military moms living overseas. Far from their loved ones and their support networks back in the States, they need an opportunity to find comfort and connections with other soon-to-be moms. The USO and the What to Expect Foundation are there for them with the USO Special Delivery Program, providing baby showers and community events that bring expecting moms together, providing a sense of family support.

At each of the daylong events, first-time and experienced moms alike receive tips on staying healthy during their pregnancies, what to expect throughout the delivery process and managing those first milestone years. Additionally, author Heidi Murkoff hosts a Q&A session where the soon-to-be moms are encouraged to open up about their concerns, ask candid questions and find support in their fellow military moms.

Join Our Mission * * * * *

The USO has always been there for troops and military families. Being by their side and lifting their spirits around the world, wherever they serve, is our focus. We're with them every step of the way. It's what makes us unique. Today, we're also working to help them as they move from the military to civilian life. We will ensure they know you continue to support them, and that you will make sure we're there when they need us. Not just today, but always.



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