



OPERATION GRATEFUL HEART

TOLL-FREE HELP LINE 1-866-452-4944

SUMMARY: Operation Grateful Heart is Alabama's program to ensure that all military personnel and their families receive appropriate recognition, tangible support, and neighborly care. It is focused on assisting those who are called upon to serve in the fight against terrorism and the defense of freedom, while they are serving on active duty and upon their return to communities in our state.

BACKGROUND: Alabama has a long and rich history of support for our men and women called to service. This specific effort began in response to a Memorandum of Agreement signed by U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and U.S. Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao on July 7, 2003. The agreement made specific plans for areas of cooperation between the departments and their work responsibilities so that military personnel could receive excellent and coordinated support as they return to their homes and jobs.

Led by Governor Bob Riley, the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, Office of Workforce Development, Department of Veterans Affairs and The Alabama National Guard took the agreement one step further. They did so by, not only making sure that personnel within their various departments collaborate on behalf of our returning military, but also by reaching out to all areas of the state and local communities. With a true sense of gratitude for our citizens wearing a military uniform and being in harm's way, Governor Riley launched Operation Grateful Heart on June 3, 2004. He is personally committed to assisting our service members and their families.

PARTICIPATION: Operation Grateful Heart is not limited to State agencies; all Alabamians are encouraged to participate. Communities can assist deployed service members and their families through neighborly acts, visits, assisting with home maintenance, or child care. Private and public agencies can use their resources to provide practical outreach. Examples include, offering discounts on goods and services, reduced or free admission to recreational activities/events, tuition waivers, youth programs, adopt-a-family, potlucks, briefings, and meetings. Some additional suggestions may be found on page two of this sheet under "Major Means of Achieving Goals". For more information log onto www.governor.state.al.us , www.ngb.army.mil/features/supportourtroops/ , or www.alguard.state.al.us/FRP/index.htm . You may contact the local Veterans Services Officer or Alabama Career Center office for information and ideas on how your community can become apart of Operation Grateful Heart.

GOALS:

⇒ To coordinate at the State level to ensure support and recognition for military members and their families, as well as employment assistance and veteran services upon their return

- ⇒ To encourage all Alabamians to get involved by showing appreciation and lending a helping hand to service members, their families, and veterans
- ⇒ To encourage business and community leaders to be mindful and supportive of this effort
- ⇒ To encourage community involvement and teamwork in honoring and assisting service members, their families, and returning veterans

MAJOR MEANS OF ACHIEVING GOALS:

- ✓ Form Operation Grateful Heart Task Force(s) in each county to provide leadership to community-based programs and activities, municipalities may form sub-task forces
- ✓ Identify existing programs and services designed to assist service members, their families, and returning veterans, establish a cooperative effort within the community
- ✓ Informally assess the nature and extent of the needs of service members and their families, identify and contact families in the community who have a member serving on active duty
- ✓ **Design and implement new and expanded programs and services to meet identified needs, task organize, publicize, and encourage involvement**
- ✓ Refer service members, their families, and veterans to Government agencies, community support groups, faith-based organizations, or other organizations that offer assistance
- ✓ Develop and implement special events to show appreciation and recognition to military members and their families upon deployment or return from deployment
- ✓ Encourage community and business leaders to help service members transition back to civilian life, provide employment and veteran assistance
- ✓ Most programs will be volunteer-driven at the local level, people want to serve, they just need to be asked
- ✓ Federal and State agencies whose jobs is to provide employment assistance and services for veterans should be included in this endeavor, all of the community can work together toward the common goal of helping veterans, service members and their families; core agencies are:
 - Department of Veteran Affairs, Veteran Services Officers – Veterans benefits
 - Department of Industrial Relations, Area Career Centers – Employment assistance
 - Alabama National Guard – military member and family assistance

POINTS OF CONTACT AND HELP LINES:

Alabama Operation Grateful Heart Help line	1-866-452-4944
Alabama National Guard Headquarters Help line (military)	1-800-231-2846
State of Alabama Attorney General's Office (legal)	1-800-626-7676
State of Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs (Veterans Benefits)	1-334-242-5077
State of Alabama Department of Industrial Relations (Employment)	1-866-452-4944
U.S. Dept of Veterans Affairs, Regional Office	1-800-827-1000
U.S. Dept of Labor, VETS (Reemployment rights)	1-334-242-8115
Alabama Disability Advocacy Program	1-800-826-1675
Military One Source (worldwide 24/7 help line for all services)	1-800-342-9647
Air National Guard Readiness Center-Andrews AFB (Chaplin= #5)	1-800-443-2985
TRICARE Toll-Free Helpline (medical)	1-800-444-5445