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Pat Tillman's legacy lives on via aid to scholars

by [Craig Harris](#) - Apr. 4, 2010 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Six years after former Arizona Cardinals star Pat Tillman died serving in the military, his legacy continues at colleges across the country.

The Pat Tillman Foundation, founded after Tillman was killed by friendly fire in Afghanistan in April 2004, gave away \$642,000 last year to help with college expenses for those serving in the military, veterans and their family members. The initial 52 Tillman Military Scholars are studying at 21 universities in 16 states.

The foundation hopes to give away more money this year, with four more institutions, including the University of Arizona, coming on board as partners. Ultimately, the non-profit plans to annually give away at least \$3.6 million - the amount Tillman turned down from the Cardinals to enlist as an Army Ranger after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

One of the organization's key fundraisers is Pat's Run, now in its sixth year. Roughly 20,000 participants are expected for the April 17 race at Sun Devil Stadium in Tempe. The race has more than quadrupled in size since it began.

"We are expecting a successful Pat's Run, and the more revenue that comes in the more we can give away," said Kadi Tierney, the foundation's executive director. "I want this to become like the Susan G. Komen run for breast cancer . . . I want Pat's Run to become that for veterans and military personnel around the world."

The Tillman Foundation, headquartered in Tempe, has 6 1/2 employees. Along with the run at Sun Devil Stadium, the foundation previously sponsored a run in San Jose, where Tillman grew up. The foundation also has a group called Team Tillman, which raises money by running in events such as the New York Marathon. In 2008, the most recent year for which financial records are publicly available, the foundation reported \$1.4 million in net assets.

The foundation gets the majority of its funding from individual and business donors. It was initially created to benefit Tillman's alma mater, Arizona State University. The foundation gave ASU, where Tillman starred in college, \$1.25 million as an endowment to fund scholarships and a leadership-development program.

More than 60 students, called Tillman Scholars, recorded more than 4,200 service hours in Arizona and other border states as part of the program, the foundation said.

With the endowment fully funded last year, the foundation has turned its attention to helping those associated with the military. Foundation officials say more than 300,000 troops each year complete their military service and return home to attend school or work, and some of those individuals need help to pay for higher education.

"There is such a need, and in a lot of cases it wasn't being addressed or met," said Marie Tillman, Pat's widow. "From where we started as an organization, and because of Pat, we had a unique opportunity to fill that need."

The military scholarships range from a few thousand dollars to more than \$10,000 per person, and they can be used to cover tuition, fees, books, room and board, and child care. The foundation received more than 500 applications last year for assistance. However, only roughly one-tenth of those who applied were awarded scholarships. Applications for the 2010-11 school year are being accepted until April 30.

For additional information, go to patillmanfoundation.org.



Nick Oza/The Arizona Republic

Thousands of people turned out for Pat's Run last April. The race benefits veterans scholarships.

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Pat's Run

What: A 4.2-mile run/walk through Tempe.

When: April 17, 7 a.m.

Where: Sun Devil Stadium, Arizona State University.

Why: Major fundraiser for the Pat Tillman Foundation.

Details: patsrun.com.



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"We made a conscious decision to pick fewer scholars and give them more, to insure success," Marie Tillman said.

"We didn't want to say, 'Here's a little bit of money and good luck.' We wanted to have an impact with those individuals and the lives of their families."

Changing the foundation's focus to assist those in the military also is helping the organization broaden its reach nationally, Tierney said. She said the military scholars will meet in Washington, D.C., in early June for a two-day summit on issues facing military families.

One of those receiving a military scholarship is William "Spanky" Gibson, a 38-year-old whose left leg was amputated after being shot by a sniper while serving in Iraq in 2006.

Gibson, a master sergeant who is studying at the University of Maryland, said his \$3,500 scholarship fills a financial void and allows him to allocate more of his money to his four children. He also said being associated with the Tillman Foundation is a source of pride and pushes him to sustain good grades.

"All of us who are Pat Tillman scholars, the 50-plus of us, are part of a legacy," Gibson said. "What an amazing thing to be a part of."

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