

PAT TILLMAN FOUNDATION

Pat Tillman Foundation awards \$642,000 to U.S. Servicemen and women and their families

The Tillman Military Scholars program provides financial support to veterans, active servicemembers and their dependents to pursue educational goals

November 6, 2009: As the Nation prepares to honor veterans and servicemembers next week, communities around the country will join together at parades and ceremonies to recognize the sacrifice of all U.S. veterans. These activities highlight the bravery and dedication of heroic Americans and bring attention to the needs of returning soldiers and their families, including help for educational pursuits.

The Pat Tillman Foundation carries forward the spirit of Veterans Day each and every day as we work to honor Pat's legacy and dedication to leadership. In 2009 the Pat Tillman Foundation established the Tillman Military Scholars program, dedicated to supporting educational opportunities for servicemembers and their families by filling the financial gaps in the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The Tillman Military Scholars program covers direct study-related expenses for veterans, such as tuition, fees, books, room and board and other basic needs, including child care.

Pat Tillman Foundation awarded \$642,000 to the inaugural class of 52 Tillman Military Scholars pursuing education at every level from freshmen undergraduates to PhD candidates. All 52 scholars are connected by their intense desire to improve their own lives while continuing to serve their country and communities in a variety of ways.

In this first year of the Tillman Military Scholars program, the Pat Tillman Foundation received 480 applications from student veterans and military dependents throughout the country. In addition, four "partner" universities were chosen to help circulate information and educate eligible students about the program. Each of the partner universities were chosen for leading the way in military support services to students on campus. The 2009 / 2010 partner universities are Mississippi State University, University of Idaho, University of Arkansas, and University of Maryland.

Overall the first class of Tillman Military Scholars represent 21 different universities across 16 states – Alabama, Arkansas, California, Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas and Virginia.

Each of the 52 Tillman Military Scholars has an inspiring story to tell and has a passion that drives them. Just as they served our country in uniform they continue to focus their efforts on ways to better their communities out of uniform.

One compelling Tillman Military Scholar story is Marine Corps Master Sergeant William "Spanky" Gibson. After losing his left leg to a terrorist sniper's bullet while serving in Iraq in 2006, Gibson endured months of difficult rehabilitation and rigorous physical therapy. While recovering from his amputation, he set a personal goal to train for triathlons.

In 2007, he competed in the *Escape from Alcatraz Swim* where he met Marine General James Mathis. Upon meeting General Mathis, Gibson's only request was to be redeployed to Iraq, making him the first ever above-the-knee amputee to be redeployed to the front lines.

After his second deployment to Iraq, Gibson earned an opportunity to become the first enlisted congressional military legislative fellow. He currently works for House Committee on Veteran Affairs Ranking Member Congressman Steve Buyer. With this opportunity, Gibson and his family moved from Oklahoma to Washington, D.C., where he has now enrolled at the University of Maryland – University College and is studying psychology, a course of study which will supplement his work with other disabled veterans. His motivation to focus on psychology is simple, "I want to spend the remainder of my life helping veterans overcome mental health problems," said Gibson.

The Foundation's goal for the Tillman Military Scholars program is to award annually \$3.6 million in scholarship funds to veteran and active servicemembers and their families. This amount represents Pat's NFL contract with the Arizona Cardinals which he turned down in order to join the armed forces and serve his country after September 11, 2001.

When this amount is reached, we will be honoring Pat's life and sacrifice but also we will be honoring his peers who continue his legacy through their own military service.

The need for support is great. Each year over 300,000 troops complete their military service and return to school or work. More than 1.8 million veterans have served in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001. More than one million children have had a parent deployed since September 11, 2001.

The mission of the Pat Tillman Foundation is to be the national leader in providing resources and educational support to this deserving group. The Tillman Military Scholars program aids all veterans and specifically the ever-growing population of veterans and dependents of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

Inspired by the distinguished life and legacy of Pat Tillman – professional athlete, military hero and a man of strong character and kindness – the Pat Tillman Foundation seeks to build a community of scholars dedicated to improving their own lives, the lives of their families and their country by creating a spirit of service.

For more information on the Pat Tillman Foundation, visit www.patillmanfoundation.org

###

Contact:

Heather Schader, PR & Marketing Manager

Pat Tillman Foundation

hschader@patillmanfoundation.org