

Willie pins hearts on heroes

Organization donates necessities to soldiers

Courtesy of the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico

What started as a deployment that took Sgt. Major William (Willie) Apodaca Fisk thousands of miles away from friends and family has turned into a project that shows the true spirit of a soldier and his community.

In May, Fisk deployed to Afghanistan with the U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division to lead and protect the troops in his unit – men and women Fisk calls his heroes. As part of his responsibilities, Fisk is the first to meet soldiers who are wounded.

“Willie goes and gets these guys when they are wounded; he is the first friendly face they see,” said Wade Mulcock, a friend who grew up with Fisk in Artesia, N.M. “He has the honor of pinning Purple Hearts on them.”

While that honor is one Fisk takes pride in as a multiple Purple Heart recipient himself, it is also one that hurts. The first four months Fisk was in Afghanistan, 1,400 troops in his unit received Purple Hearts.

“We could tell it was weighing on him,” said Nyman Russell, who met Fisk through Mulcock. “It was hard for him to see so many

men and women injured.”

To do what they could to comfort Fisk, Mulcock and Russell began sending boxes of goodies to Fisk each Friday, and while Fisk was grateful for the boxes, he had one request.

“He came back and said he appreciated what we were doing but he really wanted us to shift our efforts and send much needed socks and underwear to his troop of wounded heroes,” Mulcock said.

So the friends did just that, starting Willie's Heroes and asking friends and family to donate. Soon, they found support was everywhere they looked.

“We put our heads together and we started a grassroots campaign that brought a whole lot of support,” Mulcock said.

Some of that support came in the form of chile. When Mulcock and Russell found they had chile farmer friends willing to donate

to the cause. In September, Chiles for Willie raised money for Willie's Heroes and the two decided it was time to create a fund within the Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico (CFSNM) so they could expand their efforts.

“By creating a fund within the Community Foundation, we are able to have a legitimate

“ It's never about him, it's always about his heroes. ”

NYMAN RUSSELL,
a friend to Willie



Fisk visits a wounded soldier, one of his heroes.

place for people to donate and they handle the areas we know nothing about,” Mulcock said. “In the future we want to do more things for the wounded heroes, like focusing on their needs as they return home. With valuable donations and help from the Community Foundation we will be able to do that.”

While Mulcock and Russell expand their efforts here, Fisk will continue meeting the needs of his soldiers.

“Those troops are his guys,” Russell said. “It is never about him, it is always about his heroes.”

The Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico is dedicated to helping the southern New Mexico community now, and in the future. Founded in 2000, the Community Foundation



Sgt. Major William “Willie” Apodaca Fisk stands in front of armored vehicles in Afghanistan where he was deployed.

offers opportunities for local people who want to give back locally. The beauty of the foundation is that you need not be wealthy to make a positive difference in the lives of people throughout our area. Through the establishment of permanent funds you can sustain local charitable organizations, provide scholarships to area students and fulfill wishes that are close to your heart. Through our planned giving programs, you can honor loved ones or leave a legacy that benefits the people of

southern New Mexico for generations to come. The Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico can advise you on how best to maximize contributions, no matter what size. For more information see our website at www.cfsnm.org or call Luan Wagner Burn at 521-4794. To donate, mail your check to CFSNM, 301 S. Church St., Suite H, Las Cruces, NM 88001.

