

## GSF HISTORY

*The Gary Sinise Foundation* was officially formed in 2010, and is dedicated to serving the Nation by honoring our defenders, veterans, first responders, their families, and those in need.

*Serving Honor and Need™* is the cornerstone of the foundation, which is built upon its founder's life-long principals and long standing commitment to be a citizen of action, and to help in any way that one can, the people who serve our country.

Gary Sinise's passion in this area was born from his family's deep roots in military service and from a desire to contribute following the attacks on September 11, 2001. His father served in the Navy in the early 1950's, two uncles served in WWII (one in the Navy in the Pacific, another on a B17 as a navigator flying 30 missions over Europe). One of Gary's brothers-in-law was an Army helicopter pilot in Vietnam; the other served two tours in Vietnam and was a West Point graduate who rose quickly in the ranks to Lt. Colonel before passing away from cancer at age 39. Additionally, Gary's sister-in-law who retired as a Captain in the Army married a Vietnam veteran Army medic who served for twenty three years; their son, Gary's nephew, has served in Afghanistan with the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne and was recently accepted into Special Forces Training.

Gary's work with veterans began in the early 1980's while living in the city of Chicago. As Artistic Director of Steppenwolf Theatre, which he co-founded in the mid 1970's, he began working on material for the theatre that had been written by a group of Vietnam veterans based on their experiences while serving there. During the rehearsals and production of the play he contacted local Vietnam veterans groups, took his cast to the local VA hospital to spend time with veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress, and began a series of free performances for veterans. While interacting with these local groups he became involved in an effort to build a Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Lansing, Illinois. The experiences of working with these groups, interacting with them during the run of the play, and having spent time discussing the war with his Vietnam veteran brothers-in-law, had a profound effect on him. Later, in 1994, he would play disabled veteran Lt. Dan Taylor in the feature film *Forrest Gump* and was introduced to the Disabled American Veterans organization, which he has supported ever since.

But the catalyst that really changed Gary's life and threw him into a new level of service came on September 11th, 2001. Faced with a new reality about the world in which we now lived, soon after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Sinise immediately stepped in to help by volunteering his time with the USO. Determined he was not going to let our service personnel and their families experience the negative reception and lack of support received by veterans returning from Vietnam, Gary offered moral support, shook hands, signed autographs, took pictures, visited the wounded, and entertained the military in both the US and abroad. Little did he know that everything



he'd witness over the next decade would become the heart and soul that is The Gary Sinise Foundation.

In November 2003, during his 2<sup>nd</sup> trip to Iraq with the USO, Gary visited a school where he saw U.S. troops interacting with the local area children. The troops had completely refurbished the school; poured concrete floors, installed bathrooms, erected walls, and put in new windows in a dilapidated schoolhouse. This inspired Gary to co-found *Operation Iraqi Children* with *Seabiscuit* author Laura Hillenbrand. What started as a grass-roots effort with Gary going to his children's school to help them put together school supply kits in their classrooms to send to our troops in Iraq, has since expanded to what is now *Operation International Children*. OIC continues to work directly with the military, and has to date delivered well over a quarter of a million school supply kits, along with more than half a million toys and thousands of blankets, backpacks, pairs of shoes, Arabic-language books, and sets of sports equipment, all of which have been distributed by our troops to children in the conflict areas of Iraq, Afghanistan, Djibouti and the Philippines. Through this charitable organization, and with the support of corporate sponsors including FedEx, American Airlines and the non-profit humanitarian organization People to People International, citizens across the country can organize and collect necessary supplies for our troops to distribute to children in areas of conflict, as well as provide individual support through monetary contributions. After hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, Operation International Children established the *OIC/Katrina Relief Fund*, sending school supplies to the affected area, and is now reaching out to children of need all over the world, most recently taking part in the military's humanitarian relief effort in Haiti.

"Lieutenant Dan," the character Gary portrayed in the film *Forrest Gump*, earned him not only an Oscar nomination, but also an instantaneous, enduring connection with servicemen in all branches of the military community. His first overseas tour for the troops took place in June of 2003 with his first trip to Iraq. This was a huge tour called Project Salute with over 180 entertainers involved. At that time Gary would simply shake hands, take pictures, sign autographs and just show his support by visiting with as many troops as possible. On many of his early USO tours, service members who didn't know him as Gary Sinise, the actor, recognized him as "Lt. Dan," and deeply identified with his character. That year, Gary made six of these "hand shake tours" within a six month period. With a desire to do more to entertain the troops and families, *Gary Sinise & the Lt. Dan Band* was formed following one of his many trips overseas when he convinced the USO to allow him to take a group of musicians he played with on his next tour. After he and his friend Kimo Williams formed The Lt. Dan Band, they made their first overseas USO tour appearance in early 2004 to Korea, Singapore and Diego Garcia. Since then, they have completed over 40 USO tours and numerous charitable concerts, all courtesy of donations by various organizations and individuals, or funded by Gary Sinise personally, and he now serves on the USO's Entertainment Advisory Council.

Having contributed his time doing hundreds of personal appearances and concerts worldwide over the past several years, he has traveled to bases in Alaska and throughout the US, and overseas to locations such as Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan, Germany, Belgium, The UK, The Netherlands, Italy, UAE, Qatar, Korea, Singapore, Diego

Garcia, Okinawa and Guantanamo Bay, raising the spirits and boosting morale of hundreds of thousands of troops and their families.

As time progressed, so did his involvement in philanthropic and charitable causes. Many wonderful people crossed his path representing a wide spectrum of organizations all searching for ways to help others. He now gives every ounce of his spare time and energy to those of honor, and to those who are in need.

Gary was involved in raising funds for The Pentagon Memorial ([www.whs.mil/memorial](http://www.whs.mil/memorial)) located just southwest of The Pentagon in Arlington County, Virginia, where one can find a permanent outdoor memorial to the 184 people killed in the building, and on American Airlines Flight 77 on September 11. He also helped raise funds to build The Brooklyn Wall of Remembrance ([www.brooklynwall.us](http://www.brooklynwall.us)) in KeySpan Park, to honor the first responders, those fire, police and emergency personnel who raced to the sites after the terrorist attacks and gave their lives in service to others.

He serves as the national spokesperson for The American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial ([www.avdlm.org/site/c.gnKFIJNqEqG/b.5307877/k.B20F/About\\_the\\_Memorial.htm](http://www.avdlm.org/site/c.gnKFIJNqEqG/b.5307877/k.B20F/About_the_Memorial.htm)), traveling the country to raise funds to build a permanent memorial to honor America's 3 million living disabled military veterans, which broke ground in 2010. He is on the Executive Council of the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation and co-hosts their Celebration of Freedom gala each year at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. He co-hosts the annual National Memorial Day Concert in Washington, DC, as well.

In partnership with Building Homes For Heroes and the Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, which supports children who have lost a parent, and firefighters and military that have been seriously injured and have sacrificed their quality of life in the line of duty, Gary is engaged in an effort to build specially designed homes for severely wounded service members. Additionally he recently joined the Board of Directors of Snowball Express, which creates hope and new memories for the children of military fallen heroes who have died while on active duty since 9/11. He also serves on the Advisory Council of Hope For The Warriors, an organization founded by military wives which supports wounded U.S. service members, their families, and families of the fallen.

He has narrated Army and Army Reserve *Army Strong* recruitment ads, suicide prevention PSA's for the military, the History Channel's 10 part docudrama *WWII in HD*, and the Military Channel's *Missions That Changed the War*. He continues to do public service announcements for several other veterans and service organizations.

Gary was executive producer of the film *Brothers at War*, which provides a rare look at the bonds and service of brothers and soldiers on the front lines, and the profound effects their service has had on the loved ones they leave behind.

He was the subject of the Fox News documentary, *On The Road in Iraq With Our Troops and Gary Sinise* which highlighted his 4th USO tour to the country. He is also the subject of the feature length documentary, *Lt. Dan Band: For The Common Good*, a film about remembering those who serve, those who are willing to lay down their lives for others, and those who are left behind.

National recognition for his humanitarian and philanthropic work is vast. He is only the second actor in history to have received the *Presidential Citizens Medal*, the second highest civilian honor awarded for exemplary deeds performed in service of the nation. Only 110 people in history have received this honor. Other awards include The Medal of Honor's Bob Hope Excellence in Entertainment Award, The Spirit of the USO Award, The Ellis Island Medal of Honor, The Harry S. Truman Good Neighbor Award, and the Heart of a Patriot Award from USO of Illinois.

He has also received the Disabled American Veterans National Commanders Award for his role in *Forrest Gump*, American Veterans Disabled For Life Award for his outstanding efforts in raising public awareness on behalf of our country's disabled veterans, The Face of Valor, Superior Public Service Award, CIMA Humanitarian Award, Military Officers Association of America Distinguished Service Award, an honorable citation from the Brooklyn Borough President in NY for improving the quality of life for Brooklyn residents, and most recently the Order of Military Medical Merit for his steadfast support and contributions to Army medicine.

In addition to receiving the USC School of Social Work's Crystal Heart, the school's highest honor for his outstanding community service, the University has also established the *Gary Sinise Endowed Scholarship in the School of Social Work* to support graduate students pursuing their Master's or PH.D Degrees, who have served in the military, have been wounded or disabled in military service, are the children or family members of a fallen soldier or come from an active duty military family in general. These students' primary focus will be a commitment to helping their fellow veterans by working with active duty service members, veterans, and their families.

Gary has helped to raise millions of dollars, as well as dedicated a considerable amount of his time and personal financial resources to various military and related charities. After being contacted by numerous individuals and corporations over the years enquiring as to where would be the best place to make donations to support servicemen and their families, he realized there was a real need in community for guidance. People want to help, they just don't know how or where to start. His purpose in creating the foundation was to provide a reliable resource for people wanting to donate to programs supporting these causes, knowing that their funds would go directly to programs and organizations that have been chosen and developed based on several years of first hand experience by a credible, respected humanitarian that has personally created and developed, or worked with each and every one of the programs.

Under the umbrella of The Gary Sinise Foundation, one person is able to make a difference and join forces with a legion of supporters. "The Foundation is a strong, dependable resource to spread the 'give-back goodness'." That's what Gary Sinise wants his Foundation to do, "provide opportunities for people to give back."

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