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Providing a Needed Lift

By Walt Fricke

CEO/Founder, Veterans Airlift Command

The **Veterans Airlift Command (VAC)** provides air transportation for medical and other compassionate purposes to wounded warriors, veterans, and their families through a national network of volunteer aircraft owners and pilots.



Michael C. Hamlett, Area Sales Manager, HUMMER; Walt Fricke, CEO, Veterans Airlift Command and Paula McFarland, Zone Manager, GM.

One of the "holes" in the seamless "get 'em home" mission of the VAC has been ground transportation from the **Walter Reed Medical Center** or other military hospitals to the nearest general aviation airport.

Walter Reed is a frequent destination for these soldiers and their families, and today marked the inauguration of a new "ground transportation" solution. Thanks to General Motors, John Kriesel, a bilateral amputee, was flown home to Minnesota by the VAC for his very first convalescent leave, as well as being the guest of honor at the John Kriesel "life is good" benefit held on behalf of his family. More than 3,000 tickets were sold at \$20 each in advance of the party to raise funds for a "user-friendly" home for John, a Minnesota National Guard soldier who lost both legs in an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion last fall in Iraq. On his return to Walter Reed to continue his therapy, John and his wife will ride back from the airport in a HUMMER H3 donated by GM through one of its dealers in the Washington area.



This vehicle is decorated in a very nice patriotic paint theme that not only honors its passengers but also promotes the work of the VAC in the D.C. area, especially among the patients and families at

Walter Reed and **Bethesda Naval Hospital**.

On a practical level, the families transported by the HUMMER and its volunteer drivers will be spared having to pay up to \$60 each way to ride commercial taxis to airports like Dulles or Gaithersburg, or on occasion even as far as Baltimore/Washington International, where most of the VAC flights arrive. This takes away the potential for adding insult to injury and, in fact, provides honor born out of duty by those of us who have been the beneficiaries of the service and sacrifices of these fine young men and women and their families.

We can think of no better way to reflect our gratitude to them.

Thank you General Motors and HUMMER for your generous contribution to this work!