

Operation Helmet Local fundraiser aids American troops

By Paul Gable, The Herald, Myrtle Beach SC, Jul 6, 2006

Grand Strand—Operation Helmet is alive and well in Horry County attempting to aid the welfare of our troops fighting in Iraq.



Honorary chairman Bob Carr, left, joins co-chairs Laura Best, center, and John Easterling in displaying an upgraded helmet at the Operation Helmet fundraiser at Sugami North Japanese Steakhouse Monday night.

The concept was started by retired U. S. Navy captain Robert Meaders after he learned of helmet liner upgrades which could be provided to troops in Iraq.

The upgrades improve the helmet's ability to withstand close range explosions, providing better protection from blasts, concussions and other head trauma.

Meaders first learned of the upgrade system from his grandson, a Marine serving in Iraq. Meaders purchased an upgrade kit and mailed it to his grandson.

However, his grandson's unit refused to use the upgrade kit unless all Marines in

the unit were provided them.

Capt. Meaders purchased 100 of the helmet liners, at a cost of \$100 each, and outfitted the entire Marine unit.

He didn't stop there. Capt. Meaders formed a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation to raise money with the goal of eventually providing all troops in Iraq with the improved helmet liner.

A local group of veterans, businessmen, and other concerned citizens heard Capt. Meaders speak of the project on the Lou Dobbs show on CNN several weeks ago and decided to get involved.

"The report on the Lou Dobbs show really got to me," said local veteran Chris Panos. "We have to do all we can to help those kids fighting over in Iraq."

Panos contacted friends and acquaintances in the area about the project and a local Organization Mission Operation Helmet Adjunct was quickly formed in the area.

The group held its first fundraiser at Sugami North Japanese Steakhouse Monday night with an expected total of \$5,000 raised to purchase the helmet liners.

Acting as co-chairmen of Monday's event were Laura Best, a lifetime member of the

Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Purple Hearts Ladies Auxiliary and John Easterling, president of the local chapter of ABATE. Bob Carr, president of the Horry County Fraternal Order of Police chapter served as honorary chairman.

"We are asking every member of the public to contribute, even if it's only one dollar," said Best. "One hundred one dollar donations might save a serviceman in Iraq."

Sugami North's owner Sam Laurens provided a cookout, free of charge, on the restaurant's deck for people who purchased a \$20 ticket to the fundraiser.

Monday's fundraiser was the first of many which will be conducted in the area in the coming months.

"We would like to raise at least \$100,000 to buy helmet liners," said Easterling. "Those kids need to be provided with the best protective gear possible."

Anyone can donate at anytime by calling Easterling at 458.4110 or Karyn Barber at 839.6902.