



BLUE STAR MOMS OF MARIN

Proudly Supporting Our Troops, Their Families And Our Veterans

2nd Quarter 2013

General Meetings are held on the first Wednesday of each month. Journey Community Hub 6979 Redwood Blvd. Novato 94945

Meetings at 6:30 p.m.

Inside this issue:

Presidents Letter	1
Upcoming Events	
Adopt a Family	2
Coffee Kart	
Thank you Donors	3
Chaplains Corner	
Donors Continued	4
Getting Social	5
Coffee Kart Continued	
Veterans Day	6
After The War	
Troops In Need	7
Ghirardo CPA	8
BSM Notes	9



Editor: **Kathie Lubey**
Design: **AVM Graphics**

Presidents Letter

As you read through this newsletter, you will see that the Blue Star Moms have been very active since last fall.

We sent numerous care packages filled with stockings, home made valentines and lots of love to our deployed troops. We have helped local veterans in need with our Warm Things Drive and our Thanksgiving, Christmas and Spring Adopt A Family programs.

Supporting our local veterans is

an important part of our continued support of those in need in our local communities.

The US military commitment continues around the world and we will work hard to support those who serve and their families.

Our programs are made possible by the tireless efforts of our members and associates, and by the wonderful support we have received from both individuals and groups in our community.

I want to thank you all for your being a part of what we do, and invite you to continue to join us in 2013!



Barbara Bochner President and Marilyn Spoja 1st Vice President

2013 Events and Activities

February 6th
6:30 p.m. General Meeting

February 27th
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting

March 6th
6:30 p.m. General Meeting

March 11th
9:00 a.m. Mailing

March 27th
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting

April TBA
Veterans Support Activity

April 3rd
6:30 p.m. General Meeting

April 24th
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting

May 1st
6:30 p.m. General Meeting

May 11th
Mother's Day Tea

May 27th
Memorial Day Activities

May 29th
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting

June 5th
6:30 p.m. General Meeting

June 9th
Packing

June 11th
9:00 a.m. Mailing

June 26th
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting

July 4th
Parade and BBQ

July 31st
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting

August 13th-17th
BSMs of America Convention

August 28th
5:30 p.m. Board Meeting



Supporting Our Veterans



Lynn from the Santa Rosa VA



"I wish I had words to thank you. We have had a rough year, from homelessness to dealing with injuries incurred in Iraq. Every day is a struggle, and to know my son will have food for the next month or so eases much of the burden of being a single mom... Please know I am truly grateful for all your support and prayers!"

"Bless you Blue Star Moms for your generous and kind support of families like ours who struggle with getting back on our feet after deployment."

Adopt a Family

By Marilyn Spoja

The BSMs remain committed to supporting the Adopt A Family program 4 times a year.



In November, we collected \$660 in store cards to give to the VA social workers which were distributed to veterans struggling to make ends meet for **Thanksgiving**.

Saturday, December 14th, in the pouring rain, Marilyn and Barb met with Lynn, our social worker contact from the Santa Rosa VA.

In the parking lot we, filled her car front to back, to the ceiling! We transferred new Matel toys from a source in the **Novato Rotary**; brand new teddy bears, beanie babies, warm comforters, knitted scarves,

and a variety of other donated gifts. We were especially happy to be able to give almost \$1600 in store cards and donations for cards for Christmas. We also brought



Jennifer Barkdull from Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Novato with Barb

them many important donated items to be given to various families selected by the VA.

The Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Novato collected through a giving tree, **The Patch** online newspapers wrote an article that people responded to.

April brought us our spring donation. We are thankful to be a part of this great program which supports our veterans.

During July, we will be collecting for families for distribution on **August 1st**.

"Dear Blue Star Moms, Thank you so much for your generous gifts, because of you I feel blessed this Christmas! The rain boots which you provided will not only keep my feet dry this winter, but my heart will also be warm... Your gifts have helped me to provide my son with the tools he needed to maintain his position as a physics honor student. I am very proud of him. ... I know angels exist, I never knew they came in Blue."



Coffee Kart Inauguration

By Marilyn Spoja

On Friday, December 7th (Pearl Harbor Day), Blue Star Moms Barbara Bochner, Barb Travis, Marilyn Spoja, and Wil-la, the Blue Star Puppy went to the Santa Rosa VA clinic to inaugurate the new Coffee Kart donated by the Blue Star Moms of Marin.



Andre Mills was our coordinator for the purchase and activation of the cart. Veterans from nearby and many counties distant come to the VA clinic in Santa Rosa for health services.

This clinic handles regular care; medical, dental, vision, and mental health, for approx. 7000 veterans, with constant applicants wishing to enroll.

The wait can be short if it is a recent battle veteran or up to a many months process.

The numbers of Veterans returning home and qualifying for health benefits is increasing at a steady rate.

Veterans needing specific, advanced care pick up a shuttle that leaves 3 times a day.

Continued on page 5

Thank You Donors

By Barb Bochner and Marilyn Spoja and Susie Morlock

Since we started our Chapter in 2009, BSMs of Marin have shipped 3436 care packages to our troops. The cost of postage totaling \$42,000. Currently, postal rates are \$13.30 per box.

Our 2012 Holiday Collection Drive began in the Fall. We asked our community businesses and organizations to help us collect cash and supplies in order that we may send a 'Bit of Home' to our Troops abroad. Thanks to their generous donations, we were able to pack and ship over 200 Care Packages to our military men and women in time for the December Holidays.

A BIG THANK YOU to the following:

TJ's CrossFit Gyms,
Corte Madera, San Rafael,
Novato

CrossFit North Marin,
Novato

Curves, San Rafael

DeBora's Bar, Novato

Marin Catholic High School, Kentfield

Marin Young Professionals, Marin County



On October 28, 2012, TJ's CrossFit Gyms held their annual CrossFit Games at the Marin Civic Center. T.J. and Allison Belger (owners), graciously invited the BSMs of Marin to be part of their community. Over 100 athletes competed with an audience of 500 cheering fans. **In lieu of an entry fee, T.J. asked the spectators to bring donations to be used for our Holiday Care Packages for the troops.** Over the

course of the day, we were able to collect \$725.00 in cash donations and over \$1,000 in needed supply items.

Thank you Allison, T.J. and all the members of TJ's CrossFit Community!



Bradley Electric donated \$2000 to our fall packing for the troops! Thank you again Bradley Electric.

The Blue Star Moms of Marin, Chapter 24 of the Blue Star Moms of America, would like to thank **Matt Colvin of IAVA** for their very generous donation of 10-12 boxes of men's, women's and children's

Levis Strauss Clothes for our Warm Things Drive with VetConnect for our homeless veterans.

Novato Rotarians have been long time supporters and partners with the BSMs of Marin. Many of them attend our packing events on a regular basis, some so familiar with certain tasks they won't let anyone else do it!

Rotary donated \$1000 towards our June packing postage.

Thank you Rotary!

Continued on page 4

Chaplain's Corner

By Cathie Becker

Lord we humbly ask for those who take refuge in you will be glad and forever will shout for joy. Protect these soldiers as they discharge their duties. Protect them with the shield of your strength and keep them safe from all evil and harm. May the power of your love enable them to return home in safety. Be their rock, their shield, and their stronghold and let them draw their strength from you.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

God Bless,



Cathie Becker

Donors Continued

Continued from page 3

Rotarians came forward with \$1,000 in gift cards to go to our liaison Social Workers in both Marin and Sonoma Counties.



Novato Rotarian, Gloria Dunn-Violin

boxes, full of critical items for the summer care packages for our troops.

No, not wine, but necessary items from our shopping list. Also included was \$350 in cash donations towards shipping costs.

Many thanks to the good people of the Gloria Ferrer Wine Club.

BSMs will be packing at the Journey Ford Hub in Novato on June 9th, starting at noon. This donation is very timely.

We are very appreciative of the support that Journey Ford, Novato has shown to the Blue Star Moms of Marin.

By allowing us to hold our meetings at the Journey Community Hub, we are able to fulfill our mission of

supporting the troops, their families and our veterans. A big part of what we do is the sending of care packages to our troops far from home.



Thank you, Journey Ford!

BSMs are still looking for a place to pack and store our supplies:

We need storage space to keep the items that we collect and purchase to send to our troops and space to pack the boxes.

For storage we need at least 20'x20' of rodent proof/food safe/temperature controlled, secure storage, *plus* an indoor, lighted area the size of a medium sized classroom adjacent to the storage area for our packing and meetings.

Please HELP us find space to enable the BSMs of Marin continue to realize our mission.

Thank You



Marilyn Spoja with Carol from Novato Rotary

Novato Rotarians help us do our job in a much bigger way.

Thank you, thank you!

The BSMs have been blessed with generous donations from the Gloria Ferrer Wine Club. 6 'wine'



Gloria Ferrer Winery

How to Contact Blue Star Moms of Marin

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info@bluestarmomsofmarin.org • www.bluestarmomsofmarin.org
Follow us on Facebook: Blue Star Moms of Marin



Getting Social

By Barb Bochner and Marilyn Spoja

In early December, we attended the holiday party for the **National Guard** unit that meets in **Petaluma**. We made connections with the various support individuals who will be contacting us regarding what we can do to help when the unit deploys this coming spring. I will keep you posted on what I learn.

Later in the month, Marilyn, Maria and I drove 3 carloads of “warm things” to **VetConnect** for their distribution to homeless vets at their **Annual Holiday Party**. We even included a Blue Star Moms gingerbread house that we had all decorated to be

used at their celebration! These items were donated by our membership and community supporters.



December also brought us an opportunity for the Blue Star Moms to enjoy our own holiday celebration. The lovely home of **Maria and Rick Sneed** was the scene of our **Holiday Party** this year.

We shared great food, played fun games organized by Debbie, and enjoyed being together to celebrate the season. Thank you To Susie M. who coordinated the event with

Maria and Debbie for the games and wonderful prizes.



Thank you Maria and Rick Sneed

More recently, Blue Star Moms gathered together for a special **Mother's Day Tea**.



It was a most beautiful, sunny afternoon on **Saturday, May 11th**.

Cathie Becker graciously opened her lovely home for the second year in a row to host this wonderful gathering.



Everyone enjoyed the yummy treats both Cathie provided and many of the guests brought to share.

The Blue Star Moms express a big Thank You to Cathie for hosting our 2nd Annual Mother's Day Tea.

Coffee Kart *Continued from page 2*

There are no commercial services available nearby for these veterans as they wait for their appointments or the shuttle to San Francisco.

A coffee cart loaded with hot coffee and treats. And on this day, freshly baked and provided by Barb Bochner, an especially sweet treat!

We received a warm welcome and were given a tour for our donation.



“INVITATION FROM THE NOVATO VFW TO ALL VETERANS” Looking to meet other veterans?, this is the place!

Please join us at our monthly meetings which are held on the **2nd Friday of every month at 5:30 p.m. 844 Sweetser Avenue, Novato**

Veterans Day - Blue Star Moms Remember

By Marilyn Spoja and Andrea Patten

The day before Veterans Day was crispy cold, and clear.

BSMs Marilyn Spoja and Barb Bochner traveled to the **Olema Cemetary** to honor local veterans who have died and are buried there.

The cemetery, dating back to the 1800's, lies unnoticed from the road behind a thick natural cypress wall. Interred there are veterans from WWI, WWII, Korean and Vietnam Wars, and one young man from the war in Iraq.



Olema Cemetary



It was in support of **Jake Velloza's** family that brought us to the ceremony to honor him and his family. **To never forget the ultimate sacrifice they have made for America.**

The Veterans Day Ceremony sponsored by the Marin County United Veterans Council, was a stirring ceremony of patriotic music, and included a **reflective key note talk by Rear Admiral Schultz, US Coast Guard**, who reminded us that "...Returning veterans are not looking for a hand out but a hand up. We must provide for them when they return home as they protected us in war."

Later in the day a lively group of BSMs gathered to walk in the always outstanding **Petaluma Veterans Day Parade**. A crowd of 30,000 packed the sidewalks to watch men and women in uniform marching in formation, majestic horses, a marching band, and vintage military vehicles. The event was graced with a crowd-pleasing flyover of World War II warplanes. It was a heart-warming experience sharing with others this honoring of our veterans.

Under the guidance of President Tim Navone, **Marin Catholic High School** has instituted a Veterans Day Assembly honoring our men and women of the military both past and present. Many graduates of Marin Catholic have served in the Armed Services. Their names proudly

adorn the walls of the gym on individual banners for each respective branch.

Keynote speaker, **Katie Downes**, a Junior and Founder of the Semper Fi Club, together with their 75 members, donated handwritten cards and other items for our Holiday Collection Care Packages. Katie's brother is a Marine. Her speech detailed what it is like for families of those who serve. Excellent job Katie and **Thank You Marin Catholic.**



Marin Catholic High School

After The War

by Barb Bochner

LTC Steve Countouriotis, USA (Retired), was the featured speaker at our February 2013 General Meeting.

As a much decorated 23 year veteran of the Army, with numerous overseas postings and combat tours of duty, Steve can speak with personal knowledge on issues important to our Blue Star Moms group.

The meeting was well attended and we all felt fortunate for the opportunity to hear such an articulate and experienced speaker discuss issues in the military today.

He spoke about likely impacts on the military of the current Federal budget issues, military careers, funding for defense, and troop strength in recent history.

Steve also discussed things that parents can do to ease their children back into civilian life after they return home.

An enthusiastic Q and A followed his presentation and when the meeting was over, I felt that I had a much better understanding of this world that our sons and daughters are a part of.

Thank You Steve!



*Steve Countouriotis
Guest Speaker*

By Marilyn Spoja and Barbara Bochner

Saturday, November 17th started with a blast of winter rain that cleared as BSMs and 31 community members gathered for our holiday care package packing at the Journey Ford Community Hub. With good cheer the group got down to work.



Our loyal and much appreciated teams from the **Novato Rotary** and also

January 19th was an intense and well organized (thank you Maria, Nancy, Janice and Connie!) packing at the Hub.

With help from community members including the **Novato Rotary**, the **Colonial Dames of San Francisco** and friends and family members, we efficiently packed more than 62 boxes with goodies and home made valentines and they were mailed off this past week!



Troops In Need

Bradley Electric who know the packing routine as well as any BSM. **The Stornetta Group** were appreciated for their great efforts also.



Not to forget the many individuals, parents, kids, interested and caring community members.

Judy Arnold, Marin County Supervisor.



We completed our **spring packing** at our **March 6th** general meeting. **We packed 52 boxes and got them in the mail the next day.**

Thank you to Maria, Nancy and Janice for sorting and for all the helpers who came to set up, pack, and take down. Good work!

In April, the BSMs held a very successful store collection for our troops at the **Hamilton Safeway** in **Novato**.



Our **Blue Star Mom** team had been working hard in preparation. **Susie** had set out collection boxes in within the community, **Janice**, **Connie** and **Maria** did the extra shopping and sorting in preparation for a big packing.

A snack spread was set out for the workers by **Barb** and **Susie**.

We have been collecting addresses of deployed troops. **Bill** was attending to get the details for the postage and **Cathie** the customs forms for each box. 200 boxes were quickly and joyfully packed with magazines; books, socks, socks, hand-warmers, and Christmas stockings, candy canes, a few holiday decorations, as well as toiletry

items, food items, and cards and letters from our community. Our hopes are the troops will know that they are not forgotten, moreover, much appreciated for their dedication and service to our country.



Troops far from home happy to receive the Christmas stockings we sent in our Holiday care packages.

At our **June 5th** general meeting, we will be packing 50 boxes for our troops.

On Sunday, June 9th we plan to pack another 150 boxes with the community invited to join us.

We plan to mail in time for **July 4th** receipt by the troops.

Please put those dates on your calendar. Our troops are still deployed all over the world and these boxes will remind them that they are in our hearts!

With a heartfelt thank you, we send along our appreciation and gratitude with every box we send to those men and women who serve for our country.



THANK YOU GHIRARDO CPA

Thank You from the Blue Star Moms of Marin for your continued support!

By **Barbara Travis**

BLUE STAR MOMS OF MARIN would like to send out a huge **THANK YOU** to **GHIRARDO CPA** located in Novato.

For the third year in a row, they have offered their services to our organization. **Ghirardo** and their team have donated their time and expertise to help keep the Blue Star Moms of Marin in tax compliance. They have ensured that we are operating within our 501 (c) (3) tax exempt status. As a non-profit organization solely dependent on donations, this is one of the most important aspects of our continued success.

As a group of volunteer mothers of military men and women, with a mission of helping our troops, their families and our veterans, we depend on the generosity and the support of the community to keep our chapter strong and operating in a professional manner.

We have been honored to have the support of **Ghirardo CPA** in helping us to achieve this end. We simply could not do it without them.



Founded in 1990, **Ghirardo CPA** provides a full range of professional services to individuals and closely held businesses, including tax planning and compliance, accounting and business services, business consulting, attest and assurance services, real estate consulting, and wealth planning services.

The firm is built on two simple business premises: quality and personalized service, a formula that has served the firm well as it continues to grow and expand.

“ We strive for excellence in service and provide proactive solutions to our clients’ needs.”

For more information please visit **Ghirardo CPA**
<http://www.ghirardocpa.com/>

“While we are committed to upholding the highest standards of tax and technical competence, it is the quality of our employees that sets us apart.”

We are always seeking contact information on currently deployed military. We welcome all names and addresses for those who might benefit from a care package. Please contact us via email, www.bluestarmomsofmarin.org



*If you know of a company or organization that you think may have an interest in supporting the BSMs of Marin, or who just want to find out more about who we are and what we do, contact **Barb Travis**
btravisbsm@yahoo.com
to arrange a Speaking Engagement.*

BSM Notes

Continued from back cover

know of a school class who would like to offer notes, please contact **Elena Cahill** at cod150@sbcglobal.net.

Cooling Scarves: Are made

primarily by associate member **Cynthia Avila** for our summertime mailings to troops in the HOT zones. If you would like to help, contact her at **Cynthia.avila@ed.gov**.



in active military service, made by BSMs **Alberta Brown Buller** and **Andrea Patten**.

BSMs, Always Stepping Up!

Photo Boards: We proudly display photo boards of our children





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Blue Star Moms of Marin

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Blue Star Mom Notes



Membership:

We currently have **39 Active Members** and **10 Associate Members**, for a total of **49 Members**.

Each and every member is important to the Blue Star Moms of Marin. Some of us are able to participate more regularly than others, but that should never deter those who participate whenever they can. We try to include many activities in order to reach the diversity of interests within our mission. Our group is active and dynamic because of

what each member brings from their own background, current situation, skills, and resources.

To Join: Please contact **Debbie Countouriotis**

debbiec@timothymurphyschool.org

Moms: For mothers, grandmothers, guardians, or foster parents of current military members/Veterans, there is a **\$20 annual membership fee**.

We have a confidential sponsorship fund to help any Mom that cannot pay the \$20 membership fee. Simply email president@bluestarmomsofmarin.org to receive a membership scholarship. We believe **every** Mom should have the benefit of

support and understanding you receive from our group.

Associates: Associate membership is **free** to those who are not Moms or Grandmothers of a military member, but would still like to support our mission and participate.

Facebook: You can join the **BSMs of Marin on Facebook!** Our site Administrator, BSM Maria Sneed, works diligently to keep posts on our page with the most current and relevant links and resources any Mom could need.

Come to a Meeting: **Our meetings are held on the first Wednesday of every month at 6:30 p.m.**

If you are thinking about joining the BSMs or considering volunteering, we welcome you to come to a meeting to see what we are all about. **The BSMs are always Stepping Up!**

Donation Drop Offs: **Call 415-883-8177 to arrange delivery of donated items to Travis Remodeling at 401-D Bel Marin Keys Boulevard in Novato.**

BSMs include **hand-written notes** of thanks and cheer from school children, scouts, donors, Moms, and any interested people. The thoughtful notes from strangers add a special spark to each package and are much appreciated by the troops. If you