In Memory of Our Fallen Heroes; A Minnesota Blood Drive

Merrilee Carlson, National Chairman of Families United for Our Troops and Their Mission with **Jesse Garza**, founder of America's Fallen Heroes, at the Minnesota Blood Drive on June 13, 2007. The plaque presented to Mrs. Carlson in honor of her son, SGT Michael Carlson for whom the blood drive was dedicated to, from the Armed Services Blood Program.

Sergeant Michael Carlson, known as Shrek to friends and family, sacrificed his life while fighting in Iraq on January 24, 2005. A little more than two years later, on a warm day in June, the people of St. Paul, Minnesota, joined Michael's mom, National Chairman of Families United for Our Troops and Their Mission Mrs. Merrilee Carlson, and America's Fallen Heroes, to give blood to the Armed Services Blood Program and therefore honor the blood shed by Michael and his fellow soldiers.

Jesse Garza, founder of *America's Fallen Heroes*, an organization dedicated to honor those fallen war heroes from Minnesota and Wisconsin, heard about the Armed Services Blood Program from a colleague. Mr. Garza called a few friends, contacted some family members of fallen soldiers to let them know their heroes would be memorialized at the event, and began putting together his first-ever Armed Services Blood Program blood drive. The drive was held on June 13, 2007 at the Saint Paul Armory, where over 200 donors came to give blood.

Three fallen soldiers in all were honored at the St. Paul blood drive. Besides Sgt. Michael Carlson, two other sons of Minnesota were remembered: Spc. Edward J. Herrgott, from Shakopee, who died July 3, 2003, and Staff Sgt. Dale A. Panchot from Northome, who died November 17, 2003. As well as honoring the brave sacrifice made by these young men, those who gave hoped that their gift of blood would help bring the many soldiers still serving in Iraq and Afghanistan home safely.

"I remember one gentleman, in particular," says Garza. "He walked into the Armory with a big smile, had an accent I couldn't place, and said he had heard about the drive for the troops on his way home after working the night-shift, and couldn't wait to donate! He was first or maybe second in line. What an incredible gift from a new citizen of our country."

Dedicated donors, such as this gentleman, along with all other donors, were able to watch a commemorative video of the soldiers being honored, while giving blood. The video highlighted moments in time for each young man, from their childhood on into their deployment overseas.

“Watching the video brought a piece of Michael back to me, right there, and somehow by showing all three boys, it made them intertwined. I know it was personal to everybody who sat and watched it. It wasn’t just my son – everyone saw their soldier….” offered Mrs. Carlson.

She adds: “When you remember my son, remember that Michael loved his country and that he willingly, lovingly laid down his life to protect our freedom and our way of life, and to take care of his buds. And most importantly, in all we, as Americans, say and do, remember to be worthy of that gift– not just the gift of my Michael, but the gift of every man and woman in the military who serve our country.”

Support our troops by giving the gift of life. Find out more about the Armed Services Blood Program and where you can donate by visiting the Where To Give page.