

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 23, 2006

## **DFW International Airport Celebrates Two Year Anniversary of U.S. Military Rest And Recuperation Flights**

### **"Welcome Home Wall" unveiled; Airport has hosted more than 250,000 troops since 2004**

DFW INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (June 23, 2006) - Serenaded by a Boy Scout bagpiper and cheered by more than 100 patriotic volunteers and family members, more than 240 soldiers returned home from the war zones of Iraq and Afghanistan on the second anniversary of the U.S. Military's R & R flight program at DFW. The daily homecoming today was celebrated on the anniversary with the dedication of a new "Welcome Home Wall" to commemorate the hundreds of volunteers who have participated in the program.

DFW's "Welcome Home a Hero" program has been nationally recognized as a model for civic participation and is one of the largest public service projects in North Texas. More than 250,000 men and women in uniform on 1500 flights have passed through DFW for much anticipated rest and recuperation (R&R) since June of 2004, and today the Airport and high-ranking military officials praised the efforts of the volunteers who assist soldiers and their families in their emotional reunions and ongoing air travels.

DFW also dedicated a brand new "Welcome Home Wall" in the international arrivals area of International Terminal D to serve as a permanent tribute to North Texas citizens, businesses, civic organizations and youth groups who have donated tens of thousands of hours to the program over the past two years. The Wall will be updated regularly to reflect the community's ongoing commitment to the program.

"Here at DFW, we pride ourselves on being more than 'gates and glass' – we are a staff and a community of caring professionals and spirited volunteers who look to do what's best for brave men and women in uniform and their family and friends every day, rain or shine, no matter the time of the day or night," said Jeff Fegan, CEO of DFW. "The response in return has been tremendous and we're humbled that this program has earned the respect and admiration of hundreds of thousands of our troops whose first steps back on American soil occur right here in International Terminal D."

-more-

-Page 2 of 5-

Major General Rhett A. Hernandez, head of the U.S. Army's Human Resources Command, and Command Sergeant Major Neil L. Ciotola of Fort Hood attended the anniversary festivities and saluted the Airport and volunteers for caring for those who are protecting freedom every day. They presented the Airport with a U.S. flag that has flown over the U.S. Capitol, the Pentagon and the R&R flight's home base in Kuwait. It will become one of the first mementos to go on exhibit in the granite Welcome Home Wall display.

"I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff, employees, and surrounding communities for their support to our soldiers and families in the DFW Welcome Home a Hero program," said Major General Rhett Hernandez, U.S. Army Human Resources commanding officer. "The R & R program is very important to our soldiers because it affords them the opportunity to, for a short time, forget what they endured during their deployment. The soldiers are excited throughout their flights thinking about their family reunions, but are surprised and humbled by the welcome and support they receive from the DFW community as they walk through the airport to meet their families or connecting flight. I can say first hand, that when I arrived at DFW for my connecting flight to Killeen, the greeting the soldiers and I received on my R & R flight brought tears to my eyes and joy in my heart, and left a lump in my throat to know how much we are loved and appreciated as much as we love the country we defend."

The U.S. Military selected DFW in the summer of 2004 to begin receiving the daily 20-hour flights from Kuwait. DFW and Atlanta Hartsfield International are the only two airports in the country which are part of the program. Very quickly, grassroots groups, schools, church congregations and a variety of businesses began to greet the troops on a daily basis. DFW fire trucks greet each military charter on the runway with a "Shower of Affection" to begin the celebration. Now, DFW, the North Texas Commission and the USO-DFW organize and recruit groups that will reserve a week at a time to be part of Welcome Home a Hero. Hundreds of organizations and more than 10,000 individuals have participated.

-more-

-Page 3 of 5-

“The faces and feelings of the families, volunteers and soldiers are sometimes hard to describe – a dad seeing his child for the first time, or a family seeing their son or daughter home for the first time in many months,” said Kevin Cox, COO of DFW. “But perhaps the words that sum it up best are from the soldiers and family members themselves who write and email DFW from forward operating bases in Iraq and Afghanistan and from hometowns across America.”

Cox quoted from several pieces of correspondence received by the Airport. One recent R&R visitor wrote: “Being an old Airborne Ranger with 26 years of service I kinda like to think of myself as a fairly tough and stoic type guy. Moreover, I like to think that I'd never show my emotions in public -and especially while wearing the uniform. Even so, I do have to admit that I did get a little misty eyed from that very kind and spirited DFW welcoming. “

And from this mother in North Dakota:

“My son arrived stateside on leave yesterday from Iraq, via Kuwait. He was thrilled to see the fire trucks escorting his plane to the gate. I wish to express my appreciation to you and to the firemen who did this. It was thrilling for him and just wonderful for me to know that all of his and others' efforts are noticed and applauded. Thank you again from a mom who wishes she'd been there to see it.”

And finally, from this soldier writing from Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan:

“I really don't know how I can ever express the gratitude I feel for the homecoming you gave us. It makes me prouder than ever to be a Texan, to be an American, and to be a soldier.”

“Ladies and gentlemen, this is what this program is all about,” concluded Cox.

-more-

-Page 4 of 5-

In 2005, DFW's Welcome Home a Hero campaign was honored with the George Washington Honor Medal awarded by the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge. The Foundation reserves the high honor for entities that exemplify the essence of the National Awards by promoting an understanding and appreciation for America's rich heritage and unique freedoms.

The Airport, North Texas Commission and USO continue to seek volunteers to greet the troops. Volunteers receive free parking passes for their efforts. Interested individuals and organizations can go to [www.dfwairport.com/heroes](http://www.dfwairport.com/heroes) for the latest information on the program and volunteer by sending an email to [heroes@dfwairport.com](mailto:heroes@dfwairport.com).

#### **By the Numbers Welcome Home a Hero Campaign (June 2004 –June 2006)**

More than 250,000 soldiers

More than 1,500 flights

More than 10,000 volunteers

More than \$3.5 million donated by DFW in waived fees

#### **Notable Greeters:**

##### **Elected:**

U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison

U.S. Rep. Michael Burgess

U.S. Rep. Kay Granger

U.S. Rep. Pete Sessions

U.S. Rep. Kenny Marchant

##### **Military:**

General Richard Cody, Vice Chief of Staff of the Army

SMA Kenneth O. Preston, Sergeant Major of the Army

B.J. Penn, Assistant Secretary of the Navy

-more-

-Page 5 of 5-

## **Sports/Entertainment:**

Gary Sinise, Actor  
George Gervin, San Antonio Spurs basketball legend  
Walt Frazier, New York Knicks basketball legend  
Clyde Drexler, Houston Rockets basketball legend  
Robert Parrish, Boston Celtics basketball legend  
Ben Stein, Actor  
Toby Keith, Country Singer  
Heloise, Columnist  
Roger Staubach, Dallas Cowboys football legend  
Ted Nugent, rock musician  
Dallas Mavericks Dancers  
Champ, Dallas Mavericks mascot  
Mavs Man, Dallas Mavericks mascot  
Dallas Mavericks Maniacs dancers  
Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders  
Rangers Captain, Texas Rangers mascot  
Dodger, Fort Worth Cats mascot  
Deuce, Frisco RoughRiders mascot

## **About DFW International Airport**

Located halfway between the cities of Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas, DFW International Airport is the world's third busiest, offering nearly 1,900 flights per day and serving 59 million passengers a year. DFW International Airport provides non-stop service to 131 domestic and 36 international destinations worldwide. For the latest news, real-time flight information, parking availability or further details regarding the many services provided at DFW International Airport, log on to [www.dfwairport.com](http://www.dfwairport.com).

###