

Keiser University campuses statewide collect nearly \$15,000 in toys benefiting Operation Homefront's Military Families in need

*Written by Kelli Lane Special to the Chronicle
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In a two week long toy drive ending Dec. 21, Keiser University's 15 Florida campuses collected countless toys valued at nearly \$15,000 making the holiday season a little brighter for the children of military families served by Keiser's partner, Operation Homefront. Each campus held a kick-off event in remembrance of Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7 with special guests including members of the United States military, representatives of Operation Homefront, elected officials such as United States Congressman Alcee Hastings, Florida Senator Lizbeth Benacquisto, Florida Representatives Greg Steube and Michelle Rehwinkel-Vasilinda, members of the local communities and Santa Claus.

"In the nearly four decades of Keiser University's service to the community and our State, the outpouring of support for this event which directly benefits Florida's military children has been one of the most rewarding charitable projects we have ever undertaken," said Belinda Keiser, Vice Chancellor of Community Relations and Student Advancement at Keiser University. On behalf of our 18,000 students and 3,500 employees we extend our heartfelt thanks and warmest holiday wishes to Operation Homefront and all of the American military heroes and their families for their service, honor and sacrifice, she added.

"Just this past Friday alone we are shipping out collections to families that are part of the Army Wounded Warrior Transition (AW2) command in Florida," said Simone Hoover, Executive Director for Operation Homefront Florida. "Were it not for the partnership with Keiser University, these children may not have had Christmas this year."

Hoover also said that for service members with kids, especially in the lower ranks, holiday shopping is a major expense that can put further strain on an already tight budget. "Helping them make their children feel extra special during this festive time is an important aspect of the assistance we provide to Florida military families."

Operation Homefront: A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Operation Homefront was formed in February 2002. It was developed to support the families of deployed service members immediately following 9/11. Operation Homefront is headquartered in San Antonio, Texas, and has evolved into a major nonprofit.

The target population is American military personnel and/or their families who have unmet needs due to financial hardship, death, injury, or physical or mental detriment as a result of service in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Keiser University: A private, not-for-profit university serving nearly 18,000 students pursuing doctoral through associate degrees on 15 campuses, internationally and online, Keiser University employs over 3,500 staff and faculty.

Keiser University is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award certificates and degrees at the associate, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral levels. Contact the Commission on Colleges at 1866 Southern Lane, Decatur, Georgia 30033-4097 or call 404-679-4500 for questions about the accreditation of Keiser University.

Sixty-two percent of KU students graduate in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) and healthcare fields, providing the talented workforce necessary for Florida to compete globally.

Keiser University's educational reach extends globally through its international programs, including the Latin

Division, a cooperative agreement in the Eastern European nation of Moldova, and a campus in Shanghai, China.