

TRIO Media Group

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## ***Pepsi Grant Could Help Thousands of Wounded Warriors***

### ***MarineParents.com Vying For \$250K—and Votes***

**Columbia, MO.** – April 12, 2010 – Within two days of being in Iraq in 2006, Marine Corps Lance Corporal **Joe Lopez** started to feel flu-like symptoms. By his 10<sup>th</sup>, he was paralyzed from the neck down—after receiving a smallpox immunization his body reacted violently to.

“When I woke up, I could only move my eyes,” says Lopez, who received a medical discharge in 2009. “I didn’t know what was going on. I just remember being in the hospital, across the hall from an injured insurgent, and thinking ‘This was the closest I had ever been to the enemy.’”

The next thing he remembers was waking up at National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

During his six-week stay there, Lopez was introduced to [MarineParents.com](http://MarineParents.com) Inc.s’ [Purple Heart Family Support program](#), which provides meals and support services for wounded warriors and their families. The program, which has helped many troops like Lopez in Bethesda and San Diego, is vying for a \$250,000 “[Pepsi Refresh Project](#)” grant from **PepsiCo**.

Lopez, who has since regained the majority of his mobility, says Purple Heart Family Support was a welcome relief to the stress of intense rehab, loneliness...and bad hospital food.

“When their volunteers showed up, you got to talk to other people,” he says. “It was simply about socialization—and good food. As helpful as it was for me, though, I think the program really helped the guys who didn’t have any family there.”

In order to receive the grant—which is necessary to expand to other hospitals—voters must rank it as a **Top 2** idea. Currently, there are almost 300 ideas in the \$250,000 category. As of April 9, Purple Heart Family Support ranked **No. 10**.

Voters can go to [www.votepurple.com](http://www.votepurple.com) to register their support for the grant.

“We need to be serving 20,000 more meals, says **Tracy Della Vecchia**, founder and executive director of MarineParents.com, a nonprofit organization that provides support for Marines and their families. “It needs to be bigger. They’re begging us to do more.”

Currently, the program operates in two hospitals and serves 2,000 meals a year. With the grant, Purple Heart Family Support could expand to **four military hospitals** and provide **20,000 meals** a year in addition to offering anonymous Web communities for Marines with “hidden” injuries such as post-traumatic stress disorder.

Funding will be used directly for troops and their families. All administrative expenses will be covered by MarineParents.com.

“Many Marines in these hospitals don’t have family with them,” says Della Vecchia, whose own son served three tours in Iraq. “These are warriors who’ve lost limbs or received other serious injuries and just need a touch of home.”

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#### **About MarineParents.com**

MarineParents.com Inc. has provided a *Place to Connect & Share*™ for Marines and their families since 2003. The nonprofit organization has more than 130,000 members and 600-plus volunteers who work supporting Marine Corps families.

MarineParents.com manages or supports many [pro military programs](#), including:

- [The Care Package Project](#), which has shipped over 22,000 packages to Marines overseas.
- [Gold Star Family Support](#), which assists families of fallen Marines.
- [Purple Heart Family Support](#), which has served over 6,000 meals to wounded warriors and their families.
- [Marine Corps Identity Cause](#), which is trying to pass a bill that would change the name of the Department of the Navy to the “Department of the Navy and Marine Corps.”