

CY-FAIR EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION NAMES RAQUEL CUNNINGHAM AS INAUGURAL “1ST LIEUTENANT JEREMY RAY COMMUNITY SERVICE AND PEACE” AWARD RECIPIENT

Cy-Fair resident and Cypress Cares founder Raquel Cunningham said she felt privileged to be the first recipient of the Cy-Fair Educational Foundation’s “1st Lieutenant Jeremy Ray Community Service and Peace Award,” presented at the Foundation’s Salute to Our Heroes event in February.

“I was absolutely honored and humbled to receive an award named after a brave American who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving his country,” said Cunningham, a prior-service US Army Reserves officer who launched the Cypress Cares organization two years ago to send care packages and letters of encouragement to U.S. troops stationed in Iraq, Afghanistan and, now, Haiti.

Marie Holmes, the Cy-Fair Educational Foundation’s executive director, said Cunningham was chosen to receive the inaugural award because of her dedication to men and women fighting for our country in foreign lands, and her military service.

The late 1st Lieutenant Jeremy Ray, who lost his life Dec. 20, 2007 as he was meeting with local tribal leaders to promote peace in Iraq, was honored for his role as a soldier and as a peacekeeper at the Foundation’s first annual Salute to our Heroes event in February 2009.

The event pays tribute to military heroes – soldiers serving now, veterans, and those who have been wounded or killed in action –and raises funds for scholarships for Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District students.

“Inspired by his service and dedication to peace we have decided to honor a person every year in the Cypress, Texas area that best personifies community service, service to our armed forces, and actively promotes peace around the globe,” Holmes said. “The 1st Lieutenant Jeremy Ray Community Service and Peace Award will be presented annually at the Salute to Heroes event.”

Jeremy’s mother, Debbie Ray, said her family - husband, Randy and son, Justin – were excited when they first learned about the award; and pleased to help present it to Cunningham at the 2010 Salute to Our Heroes event.

“We felt honored that the Foundation wanted to pay tribute to our son and all of our fallen heroes in such a special way each year,” Debbie said. “It is a wonderful way to keep our son’s memory alive.”

A CFEF endowment was established in Jeremy’s memory in 2008 by an anonymous donor.

Cunningham currently serves her country as a volunteer admissions representative for the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. Prior to that, she served as a registered nurse in the U.S. Army Reserves for eight years.

She started the Cypress Cares effort by sending care packages from her home to a friend who was serving in Afghanistan.

“Soon a few neighbors got involved and before we knew it the community support snowballed,” Cunningham said.

Cypress Cares now has 300 volunteers who meet eight times a year to assemble and send out care packages to troops fighting for American freedoms. Cunningham said everything donated, and all funds raised, are used for the care packages, and the associated packaging and mailing costs.

More than 1,400 care packages were sent to friends, family members and strangers in Iraq, Afghanistan and Haiti last year.

“It has become a lot bigger than I expected,” Cunningham said.

Cypress Cares is always seeking donated items for the care packages – snack foods, dried fruit, canned fruit, trail mix, hygiene projects, books, CDs, games – as well as financial donations to cover packaging and mailing costs.

She and her husband, Larry, moved to Cypress in 2001, and have three children - Kristen, 8; Megan, 7; and Ryan, 5.

The “Salute to Our Heroes” event joins ranks of CFEF’s two powerhouse annual fund-raisers - the B.F. Adam Classic golf tournament/“Bogeys & Boots” dinner and auction and Salute to the Stars Gala.

Through the outstanding support of board members, volunteers, sponsors and the Cy-Fair community, the Cy-Fair Educational Foundation has raised \$1. __ million for college scholarships for Cy-Fair ISD graduating seniors for more than 39 years, and Funds for Instructional Excellence Grants for educators since 1998.

Contact Marie Holmes for information about underwriting and sponsorship opportunities, as well as information about the Foundation’s efforts, at 832-381-2333, or e-mail marie@thecfef.org

Other than the fact that we actually moved into Cypress in 2001, all looks good. We were living in Katy prior to that time.

You wrote “lost his life” twice in the one sentence about Jeremy Ray, about half way down the first page. Just FYI.

Thanks for a wonderful write up Kim! What is the address for your blog?

Have a super day. Mine is certainly much better than yesterday!

Raquel