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Newport Beach Prepares to Honor the Marines of 1/1

The 1st Battalion, 1st Marines (1/1) hold a special place in the hearts of Newport Beach residents and soon there will be a permanent place in their honor in this seaside community. Two large events will span Memorial Day weekend, starting with the traditional Mess Night on Thursday, May 22 and culminating in the 1/1 Memorial Dedication on Monday, May 26.

The relationship began in 2003 when the city "adopted" 1/1 to assist these Marines and their families. 1/1 is a decorated Marine unit that first saw action in World War II and recently returned from its third deployment to Iraq. The Newport Beach community has donated more than \$590,000 to provide financial assistance for special medical devices, travel expenses for families of injured Marines, special Battalion events, and support for the families of casualties of the war.

The efforts are guided by the 1/1 Adoption Committee, a group of local leaders representing several different community organizations. The committee's largest fundraiser has been its annual Mess Night. The Mess Night tradition began in the 1800s when leaders of military units and guests would gather to honor their country, unit, and fallen comrades. 1/1, a combat unit, recently returned from Iraq. Several Marines from the Battalion were killed in action during deployments there since 2003.

"We're honored to be affiliated with the brave men and women of the 1/1 and we've seen a tremendous amount of support for these Marines and their families from all areas of our community," said Mayor Ed Selich. "The events provide an opportunity to publicly recognize and personally thank them."

This year's Mess Night event will be held on Thursday, May 22 at 6 p.m. at the Balboa Bay Club, Newport Beach. The price is \$250 per ticket, which includes the cost of hosting the Marines as guests for this special evening. For more information, please call (949) 644-3000.

Then on Memorial Day, Monday, May 26, at 1 p.m. the community will dedicate a memorial in honor of the Marines of 1/1. The dedication ceremony will include music by the First Marine Division Band and the participation of current active duty members of 1/1 including the Color Guard and Honor Platoon. It will be held at Castaways Park, Dover Drive and Castaways Lane, Newport Beach. Admission is free.

The memorial, designed by artist Benjamin Victor, is a bronze sculpture set against a black granite backdrop. It represents a young Marine in battle dress, walking forward while looking back. Though designed for the Marines of 1/1, it is intended to honor all military personnel and to serve as a place for the community to pause and remember those who have served the United States. A separate committee, chaired by Council Member Keith Curry, was formed to oversee the planning, design and fundraising for the memorial. More than 200 community members donated over \$135,000 to help cover the entire cost of the memorial.

"This will be a lasting tribute from the community of Newport Beach to the community of the First Battalion, First Marines," explained Curry. "It will be a place for generations of our families and theirs to gather and remember the bravery and sacrifices of these Marines."

For more information about the dedication, please call (949) 644-3202 or visit www.city.newport-beach.ca.us.