

One of Marilou Peavley's more famous images is of the Arizona Army National Guard's 158th Infantry Division's coming home ceremony in 2007.



above&beyond

A True Patriot

Showing the volunteer spirit

By RACHEL GLADSTONE, STAFF WRITER

If you were to look up the word “volunteer” in the dictionary, it wouldn’t be surprising to find a picture of Marilou Peavley beside it. A professional photographer from Scottsdale, AZ, Marilou has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Joint Family Programs Office (JFPO) in Phoenix, AZ, and it seems she never says no to anything that’s asked of her.

Valerie Speltz, the Family Assistant Relationship Manager for the JFPO, is fond of her star volunteer, who has become a good friend.

“Marilou is a great volunteer,” she shared. “Whenever there’s a need, she’s the first one to raise her hand. And she stands out because of her hard work and dedication to the military Families and Service workers.”

In the Beginning

“It all started when a lady from Tucson asked me to help with a homecoming four years ago,” Marilou told *Foundations* when we spoke with her in June. “That was when I met Valerie. Her husband’s unit, the 158th Infantry, was coming home and there were over 700 Service Members. My job was to get cookies and water for the Families who’d be waiting for the units to come in.

“I had about five days to do it, but I came up with 2,680 bottles of water and 124 dozen cookies. I got bars, grocery stores and people in the community to donate everything. But the last unit got delayed and I knew all the food and water would be gone. So a friend and I went to the store at 2:30 a.m. and bought a whole grocery cart full of food.

Everybody was so grateful, and they didn’t expect it.”

After such an experience, less hearty souls might have backed off, but Peavley enjoyed that first event so much, she continued to volunteer as often as she was needed. She also began adding photography to the mix.

“I do all the Welcome Homes and Farewells, and I also photograph them,” she told us. “I’ve learned to watch for the emotion, some special little touch, some little spark. I try to get pictures of every Soldier.” She then transfers these photos onto discs for Valerie, who forwards them to the Families. “She offers her time and talent by taking pictures at every event, and she does it at no charge,” Valerie told us.

PHOTOS COURTESY MARILOU PEAVLEY

Keep Coming Back

In addition to the 10 Farewells and 10 Homecomings Peavley has organized, she’s also helped put together events such as Operation Home Front, which was a huge success. During the Christmas season, VFW Post 3513 in Scottsdale, where she serves as the Family Support Chairwoman, became a makeshift store where Family members of deployed Soldiers were able to shop for Christmas presents free of charge. “We had every table and every chair covered with toys, clothing, toiletries and food,” Marilou said. “There were wall-to-wall products and wall-to-wall people.”

Several ongoing events are geared toward the children of Soldiers, such as Operation Military Kids, the first of which was also held at Peavley’s VFW post. “It was an opportunity for the kids to learn how to deal with a parent being gone,” she shared. “It was also to let them know that there were other kids just like them—that they weren’t the only ones with a parent serving overseas.”

“We also held an event for Wounded Warriors and their Families,” Valerie Speltz told us. “And Marilou kept the children entertained while Military One Source briefed the parents. One of the things she did was to bring in sugar cookies, and the kids got to decorate them and present them to the Wounded Warriors.”

Continuing to brag about her favorite volunteer, Valerie could barely contain her affection for Peavley. “She’s very committed to making sure the Service Members and their Families are well taken care of. She’s very patriotic and wears her VFW smock proudly,” she said. “Marilou is like the mom that everybody would want. She has a heart of gold.”

Awards and Rewards

Although Peavley has won six awards for her outstanding service to military Families, she’s modest about her



Marilou Peavley was presented with the Distinguish Center of Influence award by the 363rd EOD.

achievements. “When I saw the list of things I’d done I couldn’t believe it,” she shared. “But when you’re doing it, you just keep going, and you don’t stop to think about all your accomplishments.”

Among the awards she’s received is one from the Arizona Commission for Military Families in thanks for the breakfasts she provides for their monthly meetings. Another is a commendation for feeding a Guard unit that was returning home in two waves. Peavley spent \$100 of her own money and hours of her time making 50 pounds of barbecue for 80 Family members who were waiting for the Soldiers’ arrival.

To Marilou, it’s all in a day’s work. And work she does. Besides holding her current position at the VFW, she’s been post president twice and also served as the president for District 4 for the state of Arizona. This year she’ll serve as the DSW Auxiliary Officer as well as Americanism Chairwoman for the Department of Arizona. And as if that isn’t enough, Peavley is also a Patriotic Instructor and runs two businesses.

“Being of service is heartwarming for me,” she told us. “It gives me a good feeling, helping my community and helping the military Families. My husband was a 24-year Veteran of the Air Force, but when I met him, he was retiring, so I was never a Service wife.

To see more of Marilou’s work, visit the following websites: mariloupeavley.fineartamerica.com

Now I have a chance to give back. It doesn’t take a whole lot to make people happy. It’s just a matter of being there for them, listening to them and getting involved in some events. It’s a feeling of patriotism for me.”

A Little Help From Her Friends

Marilou insists she couldn’t have accomplished everything she has without a little help.

“I could never have done all this without the help of the members of VFW Post 3513 Auxiliary in Scottsdale,” she said.

So, what’s next for this dynamo? In addition to other events, Marilou is working in conjunction with Valerie Speltz to organize the largest Packing Party they’ve ever done.

“We’ve done Packing Parties in the past where volunteers put personal packages together for Service men and women overseas. We’re about to do a huge Packing Party this August, and we’ll be sending over 500 packages.”

When all is said and done, it’s a wonder that Marilou has a moment to breathe. But the work is a natural for this tireless volunteer, who also happens to be the mother of two grown children. “Volunteering is heartwarming. It shows that you’re thinking about others before you think about yourself,” she shared. “It’s the most rewarding feeling, and one that money cannot buy.”

Do you know of a person or organization going Above and Beyond in support of our troops? Let us know at Editor@GuardFoundations.com.