

MILITARY SPOUSE

JULY 2016

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ALWAYS BY OUR SIDE

President and CEO of the USO-Metro Elaine Rogers
celebrates 40 years serving our military and their families.



A CELEBRATION OF SERVICE!



Hats off to the USO and Elaine Rogers as they celebrate 75 and 40 years of respective service to our nation's military and their families!

By MJ Boice, *Marine Corps Spouse*

When many of us think about the USO, we conjure images of actors entertaining troops, airport lounges and their famous logo. After all, when the USO was founded by request from then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941, its role was to provide recreation and morale services to our country's uniformed service members. And yet this integral organization has evolved significantly to meet the changing needs of our country's heroes at home and abroad. In 2016, one can see this evolution clearly as the USO celebrates 75 years of dedicated service to our nation's Armed Forces and their families.

And at the heart of the USO in Washington and Baltimore is Elaine Rogers, president and CEO of the USO of Metropolitan Washington-Baltimore (USO-Metro), celebrating 40 years of service. Elaine has not only witnessed the evolution of the USO firsthand, she has been a driving force in its evolution.

On a beautiful May morning, I spoke with Elaine about about her successful career with the USO. Anyone who has ever set foot in a room with Elaine knows she is an absolute joy; during our conversation she was dynamic and passionate, the personification of a lit sparkler on the Fourth of July.

USO Warrior and Family Center at Bethesda



[PHOTO BY JOSEPH LEE]

Rogers began her career with the USO in 1976, assuming the role of president of USO-Metro within one year; she was only 24. At the time, there were only two USO centers in the D.C. Metro area and our military was transitioning from the draft to today's all-volunteer force. Elaine saw the need to cater to the changing dynamic, which included the spouses and children of service members. Within a few years, there were an additional four centers available in the area to accommodate the growing demographic. And so USO-Metro started to bloom. >>

[PORTRAIT OF ELAINE BY ERIN REXROTH]

“I believe that if you are passionate about something and believe in yourself, you can do anything.”



During Elaine's tenure, she has navigated USO-Metro's growth from 50 volunteers to at one point an impressive 5,000. It is clear that these individuals are where Rogers finds passion. She recalled that after 9/11, USO-Metro volunteers utilized their skills to assist in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the Pentagon. They spoke with family members of those who had lost loved ones and housed them while simultaneously caring for the military recovery units that were brought in to assist.

During the height of the war in Iraq, Elaine recalled one service member who had been deployed when he learned that his mother had passed. It was 11 p.m. when he arrived from Kuwait at the Baltimore-Washington airport fresh off the battlefield, still in his fatigues. His mother's funeral was scheduled to be the next morning in New Jersey. The young service member was distraught and could barely speak when he entered the USO lounge at BWI.

The volunteers calmed the young service member before speaking to the police next door. Together they devised a plan. Moments later, a Maryland State Police car arrived to escort the service member and a volunteer to the state line, where a Delaware state trooper was waiting to escort him to the New Jersey state line. Once they had arrived there, a state trooper drove the grieving man to the church where his mother's service was held. "That's what our volunteers do," said Rogers.

THE BUSINESS OF SERVICE

One aspect of the USO that Rogers is proud of is their ability to cater to the military demographic as it changes over time. From clubs and dancing during the WWII era to the vast and flourishing programs that the USO offers today, the USO has a track record of catering to evolving needs. "What we've been able to do is look at what the needs of the military are and change what our services are to meet the needs of what the military is going through right now," Rogers said.

Take the USO's Operation Care Package—the only care package program the DoD sanctioned to distribute as a result of anthrax scares following 9/11. Rogers and USO-Metro stepped up to the plate and created a \$10 million program to continue sending care packages overseas. "It was the largest program the USO has ever

started," said Rogers. "3.5 million care packages were given or sent in all, just out of USO-Metro alone."

There is a caveat to the services that the USO provides, however. "We are here to supplement military services. I don't believe that we should duplicate any services that are already out there." So how are they able to keep track of all of the programs available to our military and their families? "We rely on our military's senior enlisted advisors and military spouses to tell us what services are needed. If the military is doing it, then we won't."

Rogers brings up a very poignant point in a niche where many non-profit organizations look to serve our demographic. She advises not to recreate programs but suggests joining forces with established organizations. By partnering with other charities and bringing in skill sets that the USO may not have, Rogers is able to help guide USO-Metro into what she calls "best in class, best in show partnerships." This strategy allows both organizations to conserve resources, which is very important to Rogers and the USO. "We (the USO) are stewards of all donations. We have an obligation to protect those funds and use them in the right way. I am very proud of our '4 Star Charity Navigator' status, and nearly 90 cents of every dollar goes to the actual programs."

Under Rogers's oversight, USO-Metro continues to increase the scope and depth of services offered. Two of the largest USO centers in the world can be found at Fort Belvoir and near Walter Reed Bethesda. "We

Elaine celebrating her 40 years of service with the USO.

[PHOTO BY MICHELLE SHORTENCARRIER]



A 1940s historical photo of the USO.

Connecting America's Service Members to Family, Home and Country for 75 years!



The USO-Metro is on a mission of connection, keeping service members connected to the things they love and fight for—family, home, and country—throughout their time of service.

The USO is a family of volunteers, sustained by the charitable contributions of millions of generous Americans. They are united in their commitment to support America's service members by keeping them connected to the people, places and things they love. Their work is America's most powerful expression of gratitude to the men and women who secure our nation's freedoms.

To find your local USO, visit uso.org

[PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE USO]

ask the doctors and nurses to tell us who should participate in our programs and act as facilitators with the hospitals to place folks with USO programs based on their needs," said Rogers.

STRONG LEADERSHIP

Under the guidance of Elaine Rogers, USO-Metro has exponentially increased its funding, volunteer corps programs and visibility. Moreover, Rogers began her journey during a time where the number of women in leadership positions were few. I asked Rogers how she felt about being a pioneer for women in leadership. "I knew that there were a lot of people who didn't think I could do the job. I just worked harder. For the first 30 years, I honestly went to work every day thinking I was going to get fired. We all have insecurities, and I think mine made

me work harder. It was an incredible incentive! There is nothing wrong with working harder and being better."

Rogers noted that the successes she has overseen as president of USO-Metro can be attributed to her mentors. "When I first started here, I worked with people who were 30 years older, but it was the spouse of a Vietnam POW who took the time to mentor me. I had board members, volunteers and staff members who mentored me. There were really so many people who helped with the success of this organization. Without them, I wouldn't have made it." I asked Rogers if she had advice for

our military spouse audience. She did not disappoint. "I believe that if you are passionate about something and believe in yourself you can do anything. Yes, there are going to be people around you who do not support you. Don't let that intimidate you. You can't go in to something thinking that you're going to do it on your own. If you think that you know it all, you may not be successful. And I believe that mentoring someone is the most important thing that you can do. If you surround yourself with successful people, they will help make you successful." ★



MJ Boice is a proud Marine Corps spouse who holds a bachelor's in social psychology, is the mother of two teenagers (please pray for her) and works as a Readiness & Deployment Support Trainer for Marine Corps Family Team Building. Her passions include freelance writing, volunteering and serious coffee consumption, all of which contribute to her "90-Nothin', Grip-It-And-Rip-It" mentality.



2016 Vice Chairman USO Tour

(Left to Right) UFC stars Donald "Cowboy" Cerrone and Anthony Pettis, Miss America 2016 Betty Cantrell, country music star and Army veteran Craig Morgan and Carolina Panthers cornerback Charles Tillman pose for a photo surrounded by U.S. service members following a USO show in Kuwait.

[PHOTO BY THE USO/STEVE MANUEL]