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Alpha Company Marines to Lead the Way at Patriot Day Parade

GRAND RAPIDS, MI, June 26, 2007 – The Grand Rapids Jaycees are honored to announce that the Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines will lead the 4th Annual Grand Rapids Jaycees Patriot Day Parade on Saturday, Sept. 8 as its Grand Marshals. The theme for this year’s parade, which will start promptly at 10:15 a.m. on the corner of Fulton Street and Jefferson Avenue in downtown Grand Rapids, is “Home of the Brave.”

The Alpha Company, 1st Battalion, 24th Marines, which are based out the U.S. Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Center in Grand Rapids, returned home in late April from a seven month deployment to the Al Anbar province in Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom II. While in Iraq, four Alpha Company Marines – SGT Thomas Gilbert, CPL Jacob Neal, LCPL Jonathan Thornsberry, and PFC Brett Witteveen – were killed in the line of duty while another dozen were injured.

In addition to their challenging and dangerous duties, the Alpha Company Marines found time to improve the lives of Iraqi citizens by vaccinating animals, distributing school supplies, and helping to provide medical attention to over 600 men, women and children. With the help of West Michigan citizens and organizations, they also donated \$24,000 in medical supplies to Fallujah General Hospital.

The Alpha Company also served for eight months in Africa as Guard Force for the Combined Joint Task Force as part of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2003. In past years, Marines from the Alpha Company have served as carriers of the 1,500 square-foot American flag that traditionally ends the Patriot Day Parade, been pen pals with Jaycees and other members of the community as part of Operation Homefront, and have walked the Santa Claus Parade route as representatives for Toys for Tots.

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“This parade is West Michigan’s chance to thank the Alpha Company Marines and other members of the military and local rescue services, not only for their service to their country but for their service to their communities as well,” said Parade Chair Amy Howell.

The Patriot Day Parade, which has been organized and operated by the Grand Rapids Jaycees since 2004, seeks to honor community heroes and pay tribute to those who lost their lives in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Entries for the parade will be accepted until Aug. 24. Additional information about the parade is available on the Grand Rapids Jaycees website at www.grjaycees.org or by calling the Jaycees office at 616-954-9409.

The Grand Rapids Jaycees, also known as the Grand Rapids Junior Chamber of Commerce, is an organization that provides young people between the ages of 21-40 with opportunities to meet new people, network for business, build their personal and professional skills and help the community. The Grand Rapids Jaycees organize a number of community events such as the Santa Claus Parade, Children’s Holiday Shopping Tour and the Michigan Special Olympics State Basketball Tournament.

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