Media Kit

Snowball Express®
January 2017

611 S Main St Suite 400 Grapevine, TX 76051
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About Us

MISSION STATEMENT
Our mission is to Honor America’s fallen military service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice since 9/11 by humbly serving the families they left behind. Champion their children’s future success by creating opportunities for joy, friendship, and communal healing, by connecting these families to one another.

Since 2006, the mission of Snowball Express has been a simple, yet profoundly important one: Providing hope and new happy memories to the children of military fallen heroes who have died while on active duty since 9/11. In December, each year we bring children together from all over the world for a four-day experience filled with fun activities, like sporting events, dances, amusement parks and more. Nationally, Snowball Express provides comprehensive support programs for fallen families that are focused on transition and connections to community resources, healing and wellness, peer engagement, education and personal/professional development programs.

CORE VALUES
Snowball Express operates with the highest level of Integrity, taking pride in everything that is honest and knowledgeable to build trust in every situation. Our Passion for Service guides the love and compassion we have for those we serve. Our Leadership allows us to inspire others and advance the mission of the organization. The Stewardship of the staff and board promote the use all resources efficiently and effectively to further serve the families of the fallen. Our Teamwork and collaboration bring us together for the common good and the benefit of those we serve.

HISTORY
Snowball Express was founded in California in September of 2006 and received 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status (EIN: 20-5627830) in February of 2007. In 2009 we relocated the organization and board of directors to Texas. Eleven years ago we started with a simple idea, provide hope and new happy memories for the children of our fallen military heroes. While we are still guided by that simple idea our overall mission has grown to encompass much more; Honor America’s fallen military service members who have made the ultimate sacrifice since 9/11 by humbly serving the families they left behind. Champion their children’s future success by creating opportunities for joy, friendship, and communal healing, by connecting these families to one another. The leadership of the organization remains in the dedicated hands of combat veterans and military family members. Together, our board of directors, staff, and volunteers work tirelessly to serve those who have sacrificed so much.

ETHOS
Snowball Express is a family, united by our shared conviction to Remember, Honor, Inspire and Heal.

ACCOLADES
Snowball Express® is a part of the Combined Federal Campaign, designated as a “Best in America” by the Independent Charities of America. Snowball Express® has received a Four-Star Rating from Charity Navigator for superior overall performance as an organization for the last 2 years.

LEGAL INFORMATION
Snowball Express® is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization.

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Executive Staff

Bob Apetz, Chairman of the Board

Snowball Express XI – 2017 will be held in Dallas/Fort Worth, TX from Saturday, December 9 through Wednesday, December 13. Our volunteers, sponsors, Board of Directors, and Executive Director have started planning SBE XI to ensure that it is worthy of our mission and most importantly, your family’s sacrifice. To our volunteers, sponsors, Board of Directors, and Executive Director, I want to say thank you for all of your hard work. I know we will successfully accomplish our goals in the upcoming months. To our families, we cannot wait to see your smiling faces again. They are the highlight of our holiday season. We anxiously await your arrival on December 11th, when you will be able to establish new friendships, reconnect with friends from past Snowball Express experiences, and make some wonderful new memories.

Francis “Buck” Kern, Executive Director of Development

September 11, 2001 changed our world forever and also changed the lives of many American military families. Over the past decade true American Heroes, the men and women of the United States Military and their families, have made and continue to make extraordinary sacrifices to protect our freedom. These American Heroes who were the father or mother of the children we serve have paid the ultimate price for our freedom. America is forever in their debt. The children and spouses that these heroes leave behind have paid perhaps the very highest price for our freedom and we are eternally grateful.

To the public:
Today, many of our service members are returning home and are being reunited with their families. We must remember however that many families will never be reunited with their hero. Many members of the military made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom and their children will never be reunited with their dad or mom. We must not only vow to never forget these military heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our freedom, but we must never forget the children of our fallen heroes. These children and their surviving parent have paid a very high price for our freedom and they continue to sacrifice as they live each day without their hero. Our mission at Snowball Express is to serve these children at our annual Snowball Express event and throughout the years.

To our Snowball Express Families:

We give you a solemn promise; we will forever honor the memory of your hero and never forget the sacrifice that they made for this great nation, and we will never forget your children and you and the tremendous sacrifices you continue to make each and every day. We will work to create hope and wonderful new memories for your children. We will show them that they are not alone, make them feel special, and help them heal.

I look forward to working with all of our amazing sponsors and volunteers this year and I am very excited and honored to be able to work with our wonderful Snowball Express families. Together, let’s make 2017 a spectacular year!
**Amber Johnson, Director of Operations**

Being a part of this organization and seeing the hard work and dedication of thousands of volunteers coming together to support and empower children of fallen military has changed my life. To know such passionate and loving individuals and to watch them pour their knowledge, time and expertise into this event each year is astounding. The organization is truly dedicated to our nations fallen military families and holds itself to the highest level of integrity. It is an organization you can trust to put the families and the mission first. I am honored to be a part of it. At Snowball Express WE REMEMBER.
Board of Directors

Chairman of the Board
Bob Apetz | Retired,

Board Treasurer
Chris Schwarz | Schwarz CPA, PC

Board Secretary
Francis “Buck” Kern | Executive Director, Snowball Express®

Executive Board of Directors
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Jack Jacobs | Vietnam Medal of Honor Recipient, Military Analyst, MSNBC
Mark “Dill” Driscoll | University of Georgia, Entrepreneur in Residence, Terry School of Business

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Francis “Buck” Kern | Executive Director, Snowball Express®
Amber Johnson | Director of Operations

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Organization

WHO ARE WE?
Snowball Express is a national non-profit that’s “Serving the Children of our Fallen Military Heroes.” Now in its eleventh year, always in December, Snowball Express holds a five day, all expenses paid event to create hope, new memories, lifelong friendships and healing. All of these children have lost a parent who were serving on active duty since September 11, 2001.

WHO CAN ATTEND
Snowball Express is committed to providing compassionate care to anyone who is grieving the death of someone who died while serving in the military, regardless of circumstance of their death. Our only requirement is that the child be between the ages of five and 18 and be accompanied by the surviving parent or legal guardian.

HOW MANY FAMILIES DOES SNOWBALL EXPRESS SERVE?
It is estimated there are more than 8,000 children who have learned the terrible news that one of their parents has died. Snowball Express encourages those families with a recent loss to attend. The 10th annual Snowball Express held last December of 2016 in Dallas/Fort Worth welcomed more than 1,700 young people and surviving spouses.

HOW IS SNOWBALL EXPRESS FUNDED?
American Airlines, the presenting sponsor, provides charter flights, flight crews and other support for our mission. We are also funded by thousands of generous individuals, foundations and grants from military non-profits. Snowball Express is an IRS registered 501(c)3 and all donations are fully tax deductible. Our annual financial report is viewable online at snowballexpress.org. In addition, Snowball Express in 2015 and again in 2016 was recognized as a “Four Star” Charity Navigator non-profit. Only 20% of charities evaluated receive at least two consecutive four star evaluations. More than 90% of the money and “in-kind” donations go to support the December event. Snowball Express operates with the support of an all-volunteer Board of Directors, and tremendous Grass Roots support.

WHY IS SNOWBALL EXPRESS HELD IN DECEMBER?
The families of the fallen say the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are the toughest because most families are celebrating, while they’re grieving. Snowball Express gives our great military families an opportunity to come together with others that understand their grief during this festive period.
Media Relations

WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

At Snowball Express we are also happy to work with the news media nationally and locally in any way to tell the survivor’s story. On a regular basis, journalists call us to speak about issues affecting the parents and children, left behind following the death of a service member. We invite you to register and attend the annual December event. More information about registration is available at www.snowballexpress.org. Snowball Express welcomes families who are grieving following the death of someone who has died in the military. Military families may experience a loss in a variety of ways - from combat, suicide, terrorism, homicide, training accidents, and illness. Nearly all of our families are trauma survivors. They all thought their loved one would return home from a military assignment. Instead, their worst nightmare came true. Consequently, journalists must be aware of techniques for interviewing trauma survivors and realize that these stories require sensitivity.

Potential Story Topics:

- The impact of traumatic loss on the family left behind, what families experience in the first few days after a death. Some families are willing to discuss this and Snowball Express will work with reporters on this sensitive topic.
- Estimates from Snowball Express on the number of spouses, children, parents, siblings, and others left behind following a death.
- The immediate and long-term effects that grief and bereavement has on individuals and families.
- The surviving family experience for the long-term - the struggle of spouses, parents, children, siblings, and others left behind following a military death - and how they pick up the pieces and rebuild their lives.
- Parenting children following the death of a parent who served in the military.
- Post-traumatic stress among the bereaved.

ABOUT OUR SNOWBALL EXPRESS FAMILIES AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Our families did not ask to become public figures when they suffered the death of someone they love. Yet a death in service to country carries public meaning, and often involves public mourning.

Many families, in the immediate hours and days after the deaths of their loved ones when they are vulnerable and planning a funeral, are also asked to speak in sound bites and provide photos to the media. Some families use this opportunity to share the story of their loved one’s life and service, and use the media to distribute information to the community about how to contribute to a memorial fund or honor their loved one.

Some of our families carry scars from their initial interactions with the media during the days immediately following their loved one’s death. Others navigated the media interest with shakiness and entrusted others to help with this, and didn’t return calls from the media because they were overwhelmed with other needs.

Still others were silent toward the media, out of fear of what others might think of how their loved one died, and buried their loved one without even an obituary.

Many surviving families are open to sharing the story of their loved ones. But often, time is needed to allow them to gather their thoughts, and reflect on their experience. Unfortunately, we sometimes receive requests from journalists asking to speak with the family of “the most recent loss possible.” Snowball Express does not honor these requests and we do not call families in the immediate days after someone has died.

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SUICIDES: REPORTING ON A SENSITIVE TOPIC

Suicides by servicemen and women require the utmost sensitivity. In the immediate days and months after their loss, research has shown that family members of those who have died by suicide, are often least able to offer helpful causal information about what led to their loved one’s death. Identifying what contributes to a death by suicide is often complicated and takes time. Research shows presenting suicide in the media as an inexplicable act, can actually encourage an increase in suicides. Consequently, an emphasis on immediacy can be detrimental to proper reporting on suicides and actually cause harm. Families who are typically best able and best equipped psychologically to not be re-traumatized by a media interview, are those who are at least a year beyond their own loss. On a case-by-case basis, we may assist reporters who are reaching out to a family in a respectful manner to do a thoughtful story on this very difficult topic.
Testimonials

Serenity, 10 years old:
“My father Matthew F.C. Straughter gave his life and made the ultimate sacrifice for this country. This was our first year at Snowball. We heard about Snowball threw another fallen family, she is a BFF of my mother. This is the best thing my mother’s BFF could have informed her about. My mother was not sure about Snowball, so she did her research and signed us both up. While at Snowball, I had a lot fun and I got to go to Six Flags for the first time. I loved the people and I loved the hotel. The kids’ room was great! At the end of the trip, I was sad because we had to leave. Snowball is the bomb.com! Thanks again for providing my mother and me with such a great experience; it was greatly needed. Thanks for this lovely yearly event.”

Jennifer Hanson:
“This year was our first Snowball Express and while we were there, we marked our 5th month anniversary of losing my husband. It isn’t easy to put into words what Snowball Express meant to my 8-year-old daughter and me but I will try. Â I guess the easiest way to explain it is to simply state that it was the first time since losing my husband that I went 5 days in a row without crying. Sure, there were a few moments of filling up with tears. Â However, those were tears of gratitude and pride as our group was shown so much love and respect from the citizens of DFW and the Snowball Staff and Volunteers. Many people have asked me what my favorite part of the experience was. My answer to them is also simple. Â My favorite part was having so much fun with my daughter and seeing the joy in her face and witnessing her unbridled laugh for the first time in a long time. It was 5 days of feeling a bit more normal in the most abnormal year of my life.”

Jessica Byrd:
“The first time my son Elijah met another military surviving child was at Snowball. A young boy approached him and asked, “Your daddy died in the war too?” My son later told me that he felt safe being with other kids who didn’t know their dads either. It was then I decided that every year we were invited, I would do what I can to make sure my child built this network of families he could relate to. Several years later we have both built a strong community of support and many lifelong friendships through Snowball. Elijah counts down the days until take off starting in July!! I am ever so grateful for the love Dallas, Snowball, all of the sponsors and volunteers, show us.”

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