



## ThanksUSA Treasure Hunt Ends Today

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ThanksUSA, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization formed last year to raise money to fund post-secondary educational scholarships for the spouses and children of active-duty military personnel, recently announced it had awarded 1,000 scholarships totaling \$3.5 million.

The group, whose acronym stands for Treasure Hunt Aiding Needs of Kids (and Spouses), was the brainchild of two schoolchildren, sisters Rachel and Kelsi Okun.

With help from their dad, NBC Universal Washington Vice President and former GOP House aide Bob Okun, their mother, Deanna Tanner Okun, a vice chairwoman of the International Trade Commission, and a small army of their parents' friends and associates, the two girls launched what has been billed as the first-ever national treasure hunt. After running all summer, the hunt, which attracted nearly 6,000 participants, concludes today. Lavish prizes will be awarded to the winners of each of the hunt's 12 stages. Those who answer all questions correctly will be eligible for the grand prize, a three-day trip for four to Washington, D.C., including a stay at the Willard InterContinental Washington's presidential suite, tickets to a Nationals game, and tours of the legislative, executive and judicial branches. The grand-prize winner also will receive a treasure chest of jewels and coins valued at \$100,000.

The prizes, all of which have been donated, will be awarded at a Nov. 14 gala at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium on Constitution Avenue Northwest, with several spouses of prominent military officials, including Lynne Pace, wife of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Peter Pace, serving as co-chairs. Tickets will be available for purchase later this fall through the group's Web site, [www.ThanksUSA.org](http://www.ThanksUSA.org). ThanksUSA is one of many partner organizations of "America Supports You," a Defense Department clearinghouse for groups that support military personnel.

But this hardly signals the end of the hunt. Already, organizers have asked for \$4 million in federal funds for 2007, and a second treasure hunt is planned for next summer. Moreover, in recent months, former Secretary of the Senate Jeri Thomson joined the group as its full-time president. In addition to Bob and Deanna Okun and Thomson, board members include former Education Secretary Rod Paige, former Wal-Mart lobbyist and retired Air Force Lt. Gen. Norm Lezy, and Frank Fahrenkopf, president and CEO of the American Gaming Association.

— Tom Gottlieb and Bree Hocking