



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
AUGUST 29, 2013**

**CONTACT:
Michele Stork
(703) 855-4108
MicheleStork@ThanksUSA.org**

THANKSUSA MARKS \$9 MILLION MILESTONE

More than 3,000 children and spouses of U.S. troops awarded the gift of education

Mclean, VA – August 29, 2013 – ThanksUSA today announced that it has awarded more than \$9 million to date in post-secondary school scholarships for the children and spouses of U.S. troops. This milestone includes approximately 300 new scholarships awarded over the past week, totaling nearly \$1 million in funds.

Since its founding in 2005 by sisters Rachel and Kelsi Okun, ThanksUSA has awarded over 3,000 scholarships to military families in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

“We were just girls – I was 10 and Kelsi was eight – when we started looking for a way to thank our troops for all they sacrifice in keeping us safe,” said Rachel Okun, now 17. “Over the past eight years, we have been overwhelmed by the generosity of those who feel the same and who want to help support military families through ThanksUSA.”

“We understood the importance of a good education and wanted to share our blessings with the families of our service men and women,” added Kelsi Okun, now 14. “The gift of education is the perfect way to do so.”

The Okun sisters travel the country speaking with ThanksUSA scholarship recipients in order to introduce them to Americans through video profiles and speeches. ThanksUSA’s new videos will be released at the organization’s annual gala at Washington DC’s Newseum on September 25, 2013, hosted by Lara Logan of CBS News. Tom Brokaw will be honored at the gala as will Col. Lanier Ward, survivor of a critical battle in Iraq and inspiration for ThanksUSA. Senator Roy Blunt, who represents 74 Missouri scholarship recipients, will also be honored. Senator Blunt took a personal interest in ThanksUSA as a House Member discussing the program with the troops in Iraq during the formative years of the program.

Among this year’s award recipients is Donnice Roberts, proud widow of U.S. Army Staff Sergeant Kevin Casey Roberts. Donnice is pursuing dual degrees in Education and Rehabilitation Services with the end goal of working within the military community.

“I am truly grateful to ThanksUSA for this generous scholarship. I want to honor my husband’s legacy by using my education to help fellow military families. My children are

learning that even through tragedy, we can overcome and succeed. With your support, I will make a difference and I will succeed.”

ThanksUSA also announced today a continuing partnership with the world-record holding doubles tennis twins Bob and Mike Bryan. The organization has established a nationwide Tennis Thanks the Troops campaign – a partnership with the United States Professional Tennis Association (USPTA) involving tennis pros, fans and local communities, and presents an online challenge called the “ThanksUSA Treasure Hunt,” sponsored since 2008 by the Entertainment Software Association Foundation, which explore the nation’s history, culture and values.

As the battle in Iraq ends and the conflict in Afghanistan winds down, ThanksUSA plans to step up efforts to support the families of military personnel who are re-integrating into the workplace. Helping service members’ children and spouses advance their education and achieve successful careers will relieve the new pressures that challenge those who have returned home.

“Our troops and their families deserve our respect and our thanks for their service in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 12 years,” said General George Casey, former Army Chief of Staff and ThanksUSA board member. “They have borne significant burdens to protect this country, and we cannot allow their contributions to be quickly forgotten. Their mission of defending us is, unfortunately, not over.”

###

About ThanksUSA

ThanksUSA is a non-partisan, charitable effort to mobilize Americans of all ages to “thank” the men and women of the United States armed forces. The organization provides college, technical and vocational school scholarships for the children and spouses of active-duty status military personnel. For more information, visit www.thanksusa.org.