



Until Every One Comes Home®

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The USO Awarded *National Medal of Arts* for Sharing the Sights and Sounds of Home with Troops Around the Globe

Event Marked the Only Time in the Medal's 28-Year History the U.S. Government's Highest Arts Honor Ever Bestowed Upon a Military Charity

USO Extends Gratitude to President Barack Obama, the National Endowment for the Arts, All of its Celebrity Friends and the American Public for Making Honor Possible

Among the Eight Stellar Patrons Honored Were Al Pacino, Mel Tillis and Rita Dove

Twitter Pitch: @the_USO thanks @BarackObama, @NEArts, the American public and all its celebrity friends for Natl Medal of Arts in excellence in troop entertainment!

ARLINGTON, Va. (February 13, 2012) – President Barack Obama presented the USO with the *National Medal of Arts* – the U.S. government's highest arts honor – for sharing the sights and sounds of home with troops stationed around the world. The ceremony, which took place in the East Room of the White House this afternoon, is an annual event recognizing exemplary individuals and/or organizations for their encouragement of the arts and delivery of inspirations to others through their achievement, support and patronage. The USO is the only military charity to receive the *National Medal of Arts* in the medal's 28-year history. To download photos of the event, view USO tour imagery and more, visit <https://uso.box.com/s/zz3sljqzmvdx4sejn2n>.

Fellow honorees include actor/director Al Pacino; country music singer/songwriter Mel Tillis; poet/author Rita Dove; pianist/teacher Andre Watts; painter, printmaker and teacher Will Barnet; curator, art collector and philanthropist Emily Rauh Pulitzer; and sculptor Martin Puryear. Established by Congress in 1984 as a way to recognize outstanding contributions to excellence, growth, support and availability of the arts in the U.S., more than 250 patrons have been presented with this lifetime achievement award with hundreds of nominations being submitted by citizens across the country each year.

"We are humbled by the President's recognition of our mission to lift the spirits of troops and their families through exceptional entertainment around the world," said Sloan Gibson, USO President and CEO. "Most importantly – we have never done this alone. From our celebrity friends who have worked with us over the years, our military and corporate partners, and our hard working Entertainment staff – we all share in this honor. We celebrate this award with all of you and with more than 1.4 million service men and women and their families who currently serve our nation."

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Since just before the United States entered World War II, the USO has been the bridge between the American people and our men and women in uniform – extending a much-needed touch of home. In times of peace and war, the USO's mission has remained the same - to lift the spirits of America's troops and their families wherever they serve. USO entertainment remains essential to fulfilling this mission and does so by sending out well known actors, athletes, musicians, comedians and entertainers each year to visit and spend time with America's armed forces and their families. Whether performing a USO show in a remote location in the Middle East, visiting a military hospital in Europe, hosting an autograph signing in the Pacific or screening the latest film stateside, the USO has lifted the spirits of millions of service men and women and their families over its 71-year lifetime.

"Throughout our history, the USO has been taking American celebrities we see in our living rooms to entertain live on the battlefield for America's troops serving around the world," said General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the USO Board of Governors and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "We are truly honored to receive this year's National Medal of Arts. We consider it a privilege to support our nation's troops and military families, and will continue to serve them as well as educate the American public about the unique issues they face."

In 2011, the USO deployed 136 celebrity entertainers on 83 tours to 25 countries and 19 states, entertaining more than 296,000 troops and military families. Nineteen of these tours were to a combat zone in the Middle East. That same year, the USO delivered more than 500 special entertainment events to include concerts, autograph signings, hospital visits and movie screenings. Entertainers who recently toured with the USO include Toby Keith, Carlos Mencia, Gary Sinise, Jon Stewart, Babyface, Train, NFL coaches Gary Kubiak, Jim Mora Jr., Jim Mora Sr., Ken Whisenhunt and other NFL greats, NBA legend Karl Malone, Jillian Michaels, Kellie Pickler, NASCAR drivers Joey Logano and Brad Keselowski, Anna Kournikova, and Jordin Sparks. In 2012, the USO will again deploy some of our nation's most beloved entertainers.

Setting the stage for USO entertainment is the legendary Bob Hope, who traveled the globe in times of war and peace entertaining service men and women for nearly six decades. Nicknamed "America's No. 1 Soldier in Greasepaint" and "G.I. Bob," Hope's early support of the U.S. military led to a formal relationship with the USO during World War II. Over the course of his career, Hope appeared in or hosted hundreds of USO tours, including 35 consecutive Christmas tours. Befriended by virtually every U.S. President since Franklin D. Roosevelt, Hope was awarded the *National Medal of Arts* by President Bill Clinton in 1995 for his lifetime achievements as a comedian, actor and fundraiser for the USO, among other charitable causes.

Recipients of the *National Medal of Arts* are personally selected by the President of the United States. Each year, the National Endowment for the Arts initiates the selection process by soliciting nominations for the Medal from the public and various arts fields. Nominations are reviewed by the National Council on the Arts, composed of Presidentially-appointed, Senate-confirmed individuals. The National Council's list of nominees is then forwarded to the President for consideration with candidates of the President's own choosing. Past honorees include such notable artists as Quincy Jones, Meryl Streep, James Taylor, Bob Dylan, Clint Eastwood, Dolly Parton, George Strait and Smokey Robinson, among others.

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About the USO

The USO (United Service Organizations) lifts the spirits of America's troops and their families millions of times each year at hundreds of places worldwide. We provide a touch of home through centers at airports and military bases in the U.S. and abroad, top quality entertainment and innovative programs and services. We also provide critical support to those who need us most, including forward-deployed troops and their families, wounded warriors, military families and the families of the fallen.

The USO is a private, nonprofit organization, not a government agency. We rely on the generosity of our volunteers and donors. In addition to individual donors and corporate sponsors, the USO is supported by President's Circle Partners: American Airlines, Kangaroo Express, Kroger, Northrop Grumman Corporation and TriWest Healthcare Alliance and Worldwide Strategic Partners: AT&T, Inc., BAE Systems, The Boeing Company, Clear Channel Communications, The Coca-Cola Company, Lockheed Martin, Microsoft Corporation and Procter & Gamble. We are also supported through the United Way and Combined Federal Campaign (CFC-11381). To join us in this patriotic mission, and to learn more about the USO, please visit uso.org.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts was established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government. To date, the NEA has awarded more than \$4 billion to support artistic excellence, creativity, and innovation for the benefit of individuals and communities. The NEA extends its work through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector. To join the discussion on how art works, visit the NEA at arts.gov.

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