



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Injured Marines, Gold Star Family Team Up to Conquer the Marine Corps Marathon on October 28**

*Marines Raising Funds to Support Marines Injured in Iraq or Afghanistan*

**Washington, D.C.** (October 04, 2007) – LCpl. Josef Lopez and Cpl. Neil Schalk didn't know each other while serving in the Marine Corps in Iraq, but the invisible bonds of brotherhood that tie Marines together made it an easy decision for them to support each other through their next challenge: the Marine Corps Marathon. Those same bonds also made it an easy decision for a Gold Star family to support their cause.

"The story is one of the most inspiring I have ever heard," said Tracy Della Vecchia, founder of MarineParents.com, which brought the unlikely trio together at their annual conference in April. "You have two amazing Marines – both served in Iraq and both overcoming significant medical challenges – joining together to help each other get through 26.2 miles. And, you have a foundation started by Gold Star parents providing the tools for them to do so. It really just shows you the incredible bond that Marines and their families form."

26.2 miles can challenge even the most experienced competitor, and LCpl. Josef Lopez knew he needed to gain a new set of skills to finish the race. In October 2006, LCpl. Lopez became very ill in Iraq, which caused total paralysis and months of hospitalization and recuperation. However, rather than let that stop him, he set a new goal for himself: completing his first ever marathon.

To compete, LCpl. Lopez will be using a customized hand cycle donated by Heart of a Marine Foundation (HOMF), a foundation started by the parents of a Marine killed in Iraq in 2004. But, LCpl. Lopez's support didn't stop there – a fellow Marine was ready to offer his assistance after a chance meeting.

Cpl. Neil Schalk is a Purple Heart Marine who sustained serious injuries from an IED explosion in 2005. After recovering from his injuries, he began marathon training and has now run two marathons in two years. He volunteered to help make sure LCpl. Lopez would finish the marathon by doing "whatever it takes" to make sure he gets to that finish line. With a customized hand cycle from HOMF and training support and assistance along the way from Cpl. Schalk, LCpl. Lopez is confident his Marine Corps-inspired persistence will get him to the finish line.

LCpl. Lopez and Cpl. Schalk are also using the race to support other injured Marines, by raising funds to support two of MarineParents.com's outreach programs. Purple Heart Family Support and Operation PAL provide both meals to patients and families at the National Naval Medical Center and "adopt" injured Marines to send cards, letters and prayers to.

To learn more about LCpl. Lopez and Cpl. Schalk or to donate money to support their fundraising goals, visit <http://www.teammarineparents.com/2007-mcm.asp>. To learn more about Heart of a Marine Foundation, visit [www.heartofamarine.com](http://www.heartofamarine.com).

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