



USO AND FORMER ARMY SPECIALIST SHOSHANA JOHNSON JOINS BUILD-A-BEAR WORKSHOP® FOR OPERATION STUFFED WITH HUGS

May 1, 2004

CHILDREN OF MILITARY FAMILIES RECOGNIZED ON NATIONAL ARMED FORCES DAY

ST. LOUIS, MO (May 2004) - Some have served and sacrificed for their country - and some of them are still in diapers. They are the children of U.S. military personnel and on May 15, National Armed Forces Day, more than 1.1 million children under the age of 18 of military personnel serving on active duty will be recognized with a special program in their honor.

More than 40,000 teddy bears will be deployed on May 15 as part of the fourth annual Stuffed With Hugs™, a charitable program of Build-A-Bear Workshop. Families from coast to coast are invited to visit stores and make bears that will be given to children of United States military personnel serving away from home, providing these children with a special friend that is an international symbol of comfort and care. Code-named Operation Stuffed With Hugs, the event provides children the opportunity to help other children while learning about and celebrating Armed Forces Day. Former Army Specialist and Iraqi POW Shoshana Johnson will serve as national spokesperson and host of the day. Build-A-Bear Workshop has also partnered with the USO (United Service Organizations) to help deliver bears to children whose parents are serving in the military. The teddy bears will be donated domestically and internationally.

"Operation Stuffed With Hugs allows kids to express their patriotism while helping others going through difficult times," said Johnson, a mother who knows first hand the impact that serving in the military can have on children. "As a former soldier and a mother, I could not be more proud to be part of such a special program."

On May 15, the first 200 people at each of the more than 150 Build-A-Bear Workshop stores will be invited to make a bear for free that will be donated to children of military personnel on active duty. Participants will also be able to meet Build-A-Bear Workshop mascot Bearemy® as well as sign a special Operation Stuffed With Hugs card that will be delivered to personnel at military bases throughout the United States and overseas. Additionally, each attendee will be given a \$3 off a \$15 purchase Build-A-Bear Workshop® coupon for their participation.

"Stuffed with Hugs is an example of our continued commitment to children," said Maxine Clark, Chief Executive Bear of Build-a-Bear Workshop®. "This year, by aligning with Armed Forces Day, we are able to bring the joy of a teddy bear to a special group often overlooked - the families of our military personnel."

Additionally, in honor of Operation Stuffed With Hugs, mayors in cities across the country will proclaim May 15 "Operation Stuffed With Hugs Day" to recognize the children. Currently, 613,400 members of the military on active duty have children. 1,170,390 children under the age of 18 have parents on active duty in the military. Of that, more than 50 percent are under the age of seven years old.

To learn about Operation Stuffed With Hugs activities or to find a store in your area, visit www.buildabear.com

About Build-A-Bear Workshop

Build-A-Bear Workshop is an interactive, entertainment mall-based retailer that invites Guests of all ages to create their own customized stuffed animals through an exciting bear-making process. The first store opened in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1997, and the company now operates over 150 locations in the US with four stores in Canada. Build-A-Bear Workshop opened its first international store in Sheffield, England in the fall of 2003 and recently opened locations in Japan and Korea. The company is on track to open more international stores this year including its first stores in France and Denmark, making it the global leader in the teddy bear business.

Early this year, Build-A-Bear Workshop introduced Friends 2B Made™, a new product line based on the simple premise that kids, especially girls, love dolls. With sparkly eyes, manicured toes, super hair and overall great style, these dolls are the most wonderful friends a girl could ever wish for! For more information on the company and its products call (888) 560-BEAR or visit the company's award-winning web site at www.buildabear.com.

About Shoshana Johnson

Shoshana Nyree Johnson, a second-generation Army Veteran, was born in the Republic of Panama to Panamanian parents Claude and Eunice 31 years ago. Johnson lives in El Paso, Texas with her daughter Janelle, her sisters, Nikki and Erika, and two nieces.

In February 2003, while serving her second military assignment at Ft. Bliss, Texas, Johnson received orders to deploy to Iraq and to carry through her duties as a Food Service Specialist, (92G) with the 507th Maintenance Company, 552 Battalion 11th Brigade. On March 23, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Johnson was in a convoy that was ambushed in the city of an-Nasiriyah. Johnson received a bullet wound to her ankle, causing injuries to both legs. She and 5 other members of the 507th Maintenance Company were captured and taken Prisoners of War. The ambush and its aftermath made world news headlines.

House raids conducted by US Marines in the city of Samarra, Iraq, resulted in the successful rescue of seven POWs on the morning of April 13. Three days later, Johnson, together with six former POWs, came back to a heroes welcome in the US with a cheering crowd of over 3,000 people.

Specialist Johnson retired from the Army on a Temporary Disability Honorable Discharge on December 12, 2003. Johnson's awards and decorations include the US Army Service Ribbon, Army Commendation Ribbon, National Defense Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, Bronze Star Medal, Purple Heart Medal, and the Prisoner of War Medal. US Army officials identified Johnson as the first female POW of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the first black female POW in US war history.

About the USO

For 63 years, the USO (United Service Organizations) has brought a touch of home to America's military personnel. The USO is a congressionally chartered, nonprofit organization relying on donations from individuals, organization and corporations to support programs and services for service members and their families. For more information on the USO, please visit www.uso.org.