

## Hernando mother with charity for troops becomes finalist for Energizer Keep Going Hall of Fame



The Energizer Bunny high-fives Dee Mills at VFW Post 9236 on Tuesday. Mills, the mother of a Marine killed in Iraq, founded Lea's Prayers and Postage.

HERNANDO BEACH — Dee Mills was ambushed Tuesday morning at VFW Post 9263, and she didn't mind one bit.

The founder of Lea's Prayers and Postage, a two-year fundraiser to raise money for sending packages to military personnel overseas, had just accepted a \$250 check from the post and its auxiliary to benefit her cause.

"This is a rare moment," said the 53-year-old Masaryktown Gold Star mother. "A hundred percent will go to pay postage."

Through the door burst a 10-foot-tall pink Energizer bunny of TV ad fame, tenaciously beating his drum and backpacking a mock heroic-sized Energizer battery.

Accompanying him was Katie Zeidman, a public relations specialist for the company, who announced that Mills is one of 10 national finalists in the company's Energizer Keep Going Hall of Fame.

Mills' hands flew to her cheeks. She gasped, "Oh, no," followed by a few sniffles, then, "Oh, wow!"

Urged to speak, Mills began, "I don't know that I deserve this."

An audience of friends, star mothers and veterans chorused with enthusiasm, "Oh, yes."

Mills launched Lea's Prayers and Postage soon after her son, Marine Sgt. Lea Mills, then 21, was killed in action in Iraq in April 2006. She has raised more than \$80,000 to ensure that servicemen and women will know, through receipt of edible treats, personal care items and messages, that they are not forgotten and that their service is appreciated.

Every penny Mills raises goes to postage. She prays over every package that passes through her hands.

She handles parcels collected and packed by such Hernando organizations as Treat the Troops, Gifts from Home, Friends from Campers Holiday, also a military support group in Brookridge.

"You are all a part of this," Mills told the crowd. "I receive this honor for you guys." She high-fived the bunny as he raised his drumstick.

With a hug to Janice Zabel, a Hernando Beach Blue Star mother who nominated Mills for the award, Mills asked, "How could you have kept this a secret from me?" No words followed, just a clinching, lingering hug with moist eyes.

A Gold Star mother is one who has lost a son or daughter in active duty. A Blue Star mother is one who has an offspring in the military.

In her nomination essay, Zabel wrote, "Dee energizes our troops every time a package is received, for they know they are not forgotten. Dee runs from one meeting to the next. She keeps going, going just like the bunny, banging her drum, making sure our troops are not forgotten, making sure a package gets out, until they all come home and are able to bang their own drums for freedom."

Zabel noted Mills' organizing of fundraising dances, walks, runs, bicycle poker races and talks "to any organization that will have her."

It's not over yet. From Friday through Aug. 7, people can go to [www.energizer.com/halloffame](http://www.energizer.com/halloffame) to vote their favorite among the 10 finalists, who were gleaned by a company panel from 100 semifinalists.

The top vote getter will receive \$10,000 plus a \$5,000 donation to his or her favorite charity. If she succeeds, Mills said, "Well, you know what my charity is."

Visitors may cast one vote every day for the duration of the contest. The winner is to be announced in September.

Every vote also triggers a donation from Energizer to the Cal Ripken Sr. Foundation, which funds sports programs and buys equipment for youth groups and schools. Cal Ripken Jr. was the first Energizer Hall of Fame winner four years ago. The retired player of the Baltimore Orioles baseball team took the field more than 2,000 times without missing a game.

The Keep Going Hall of Fame "celebrates people whose actions best exemplify the qualities of the Energizer Bunny, such as perseverance, determination and a never-quit attitude," states a company news release.

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Linda Kidwell, left, president of Gifts from Home, holds back tears Tuesday. "She mails my packages and she's just a blessing from God," Kidwell said of Mills.

## **Fast facts**

### **Where to vote**

To vote for Dee Mills of Masaryktown and help her win \$15,000, visit [www.energizer.com/halloffame](http://www.energizer.com/halloffame). Voting continues through Aug. 7.



Dee is a Gold Star Mother. She has suffered the unimaginable loss of a son who was killed in action. Dee will tell you, Once a Marine Mom, always a Marine Mom. She has dedicated herself to helping other men and women serving in the military. Dee formed an organization, Lea's Prayers & Postage, that funds postage for care packages that are shipped overseas. Her energy is boundless as she creatively finds ways to fund her cause. Thousands of packages have been shipped with the help of Lea's Prayers and Postage.



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### 4th Annual AUSA/BAE Systems Golf Event Is Big Success



Support committee. Some \$18,000 will be available to help soldiers, veterans and their families in need. Other major donations from the fund annually provide five \$1000 scholarships to soldier offsprings, soldiers and veterans. MAJ Matt Anderson, operations officer for the 1/134th Field Artillery Battalion, Army National Guard, was the luncheon speaker. He discussed the work of the Army's soldiers in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He cut the Army birthday cake. Three skydivers of Team Fastrax, representing Selection.Com, opened the golf event by delivering the American flag and U.S. Army banner. **The Blue Star Mothers of American, NKY Chapter 5, participated by selling mulligans and raised some \$1000 for its activities.** COL Rick Schenck and LTC Paul Fellingner were co-chairs of the successful golf benefit event.

**MANY MANY THANKS TO OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS  
FROM THE  
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