

“All I did was make a phone call”

By: Meral Clarke, Kiwanis Club of Marietta



When Pam Younker, steadfast Kiwanian and Community Relations Liaison for Children's Healthcare in Atlanta, answered her phone that fateful day, she could not have foreseen the ensuing chain of events culminating in an outpouring of love, support, and compassion for the family of a fallen soldier.

Sergeant 1st Class (SFC) Omar Forde, from Marietta, GA, valiantly served his country in Afghanistan. Having built an illustrious decade-long military career and separated from his beloved wife and two young children, he never wavered in his duty and routinely engaged in combat; continually placing his country first and foremost before his own safety.

Tragically, this brave soul lost his life in battle leaving his young family and mother behind to mourn his memory. He was killed, along with five fellow soldiers, in Afghanistan on December 17, 2013. Omar, the only child of a single mother from Jamaica, was an upstanding young man and athletic stand-out at Kennesaw Mountain High School in suburban Atlanta. Upon graduation, in lieu of accepting a football scholarship, Omar chose to join the Army and serve his country. Prior to deployment, he married his high school sweetheart, Megan. The couple has two sons, Ayden, 5, and Devery, 18 months.

Following SFC Forde's death, Pam received a call from an old friend, who happened to be the next door neighbor of SFC Forde's mother, asking if she knew anyone at Lockheed Martin in Marietta, GA. He wished to inquire if he could borrow some flags to line the streets of Mrs. Forde's subdivision; she had left town to retrieve his remains for the funeral. Pam informed him that as a member of *"Marietta Kiwanis, and flags, well, that's what we do!"*

Knowing her Kiwanis club routinely placed flags throughout the community on major holidays to honor members of the armed services, she immediately called Pat Huey, Executive Director of the Kiwanis Club of Marietta, to inquire if Kiwanis members could help. Time was short; the flags had to be placed that day.

Pat Huey determinedly responded that, at such late notice, it would be difficult but *"would somehow get the flags displayed."* She spoke with Flag Project Committee Co-Chairs, Glenn Graham, Jim Mallard, and Justin O'Dell, and decided to send out an email to the entire club membership requesting assistance.

Marietta Kiwanis member Glenn Graham sprang into action. Working with several other Kiwanians and neighbors who stepped in to help, 140 flags were placed, in a single afternoon, throughout the subdivision where Omar grew up. Seeing the flags alongside the neighborhood's holiday decorations was truly inspirational. *"What an awesome sight,"* whispered one of the neighbors as she wiped away her tears, *"bless you for doing this."*

Another neighbor, Jodi Martin, who stepped in to help place flags expressed her appreciation to Pam Younker and the Marietta Kiwanis Club as well. *"That night, the never ending cold rain came through. My mom and I came home from the grocery store and there was a man putting out some flags at the (subdivision) entrance. My heart skipped a beat due to the solemn patriotism of the moment and I immediately turned around my vehicle to go back and offer thanks. He expressed his need to get the flags in quickly. He stated that all the other Kiwanis members that could help were out ringing bells (for*

the Salvation Army) so he was working solo after a long day he already had himself. His name was Glenn Graham and the fact that he would take time out of his busy life to do that solo for a local fallen soldier...how can you ever repay thanks for that? I would have to guess about 15 minutes or so later, a few phone calls and texts, and I had a growing group of neighbors out there helping Glenn. What an amazing sight to see with how fast an assembly line formed with my children carrying flags and propping them at each mailbox, my mom who is disabled, moving vehicles for light from the headlights, Glenn, my husband, and our male neighbors with rebar and hammers and myself and other wives shining flashlights and placing flags. A small timeframe of fellowship, collaboration, one mission, one cause, and giving to others....and before we knew it, it was done. I was so grateful and looked forward to (Omar's) family seeing them. Later, I thanked Pam Younker, who in her reply merely said, 'All I did was make a phone call.' She is indeed an inspiration to me. I am humbled and honored to be part of such a great community."

But, Kiwanians didn't stop there. Many helped with the flags, but so did others by going to the airport in the dark, early morning hours to honor Omar's remains as he returned home. Members attended visitation with the family and participated in the funeral service. Some of them stood with flags to honor SFC Forde and his family during burial. Many prayed for strength, faith and grace for his family; especially, the two young children left behind who will only know their father through his gallant acts of bravery and ultimate sacrifice.

Pam Younker eloquently expresses her thoughts in this manner: *"this simple act of kindness and ministry to the family and friends was far-reaching. I have received many phone calls and emails asking how to help the family. In fact, the daughter of a deployed sailor called me to say she had seen the flags and didn't know what they were for. She asked a neighbor and got my number to call. Her family wanted to help. I am so very thankful to belong to a group who values our military and the sacrifices made. This week, I heard U.S. Staff Sergeant Salvatore Giunta, Medal of Honor recipient, say it best. 'We do not fight because we hate what's in front of us. We fight because we love what's at home.' Thank you all for being part of what is at home. God bless you."*

Semper fi.

Donations for SFC Omar Forde's family:

Donations to help Sergeant First Class Omar Forde's family can be made in two ways. Megan, SFC Forde's wife, is very appreciative of the concern and assistance. Megan has set up an account for their sons, Ayden, 5, and Devery, 18 months, to help them as they face the future. Here are the options for donating:

- You can donate by using PayPal, going through Megan's email, moforde3@gmail.com. You may use your bank account or your credit card. If you use a credit card, you should select "goods or services," so you won't pay a fee. Be aware if you use your credit card, Megan will have to pay the fee on her end. The only way there is no fee is if the bank accounts are linked. The account she has set up is a savings account for the boys.
- You may send a check directly to Megan. Address: 1743 Sutter Woods Road, Junction City, KS 66441