

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

Volume 158, No. 120

## Lawyers send golf balls and clubs to thankful troops

### Chicago attorneys participate in raising money for 'Bunkers in Baghdad' campaign at a local event

BY PAT MILHIZER

Law Bulletin staff writer

Four years ago, Buffalo, N.Y., attorney Joe Hanna saw a news broadcast that showed American troops hitting golf balls in the Iraq desert.

Next, he read a magazine article about soldiers relieving stress by breaking out golf clubs.

Then he decided to get clubs and balls to the troops.

"Any opportunity that you have to support our soldiers who do so much to defend our freedom and democracy is the least we can do here stateside," said Hanna of Goldberg, Segalla LLP.

"The feedback is what motivates me — when I hear back from the soldiers who say, 'Thanks for sending us a little slice of home' or 'Thank you for not forgetting about us.'

"The stresses upon them, day in and day out, are nothing I can imagine. If getting golf clubs and golf balls is going to make their lives better, help with their mental state, I couldn't think of not doing it for them."

Since it started in 2008, the "Bunkers in Baghdad" project has sent about 3.2 million golf balls and 63,000 clubs to troops stationed in the United States and the rest of the world.

The equipment provides rehabilitative exercises for injured troops and offers the men and women a temporary escape from military life overseas.

SmithAmundsen LLC sponsored an event here this month that attracted 65 attendees to raise money for the postage costs associated with sending the equipment.

Businesses such as Callaway Golf Co. and people all over country donate the equipment.

Timothy L. Epstein, who chairs the sports law practice group at SmithAmundsen, said the program deserves support because of "the profound effect, the reactions that I've seen from the service members who had the benefit of having golf equipment sent to them when they're in such bad places.

"It's a reminder of home, but not your typical reminder of home with a picture or video or video game or food from home. It's something active they can do that really takes them to another place, and I think that's important where it shows a connection between those of us who are back home and those of us who are deployed.

"And it reminds them that they're not just soldiers and Marines fighting, but they're also human beings. And it's good to keep that connection going with who they are as people. It helps to keep their sanity. It's just a good thing and it's something that people can get behind regardless of how you feel about the military and the wars we're fighting."

This is the third year that



(From left to right) Timothy L. Epstein, of SmithAmundsen LLC, Marine Capt. Fletcher Marks, Marine 1st Lt. Marvin Mathelier and attorney Joe Hanna talked at the recent "Bunkers in Baghdad" project event in Chicago. Paul McGrath

supporters hosted a fundraiser in Chicago.

The effort also is personal for Epstein because his wife, Sara Leakey, served as a captain in the Army and went to Iraq for 11 months in 2009 and 2010. Epstein and Leakey were dating when she left; they got married when she returned.

"It certainly was hard for both of us to hear that she was going to be deployed for her last year of inactive duty," Epstein said.

"But I think we had both realized that we had found each other; and even though we weren't engaged when she found out, we recognized we wanted to spend the rest of our lives together."

Bunkers in Baghdad sent golf supplies to Leakey's Army unit.

"Although she's not a big golfer herself, I think it was important for her men to have that level of recreation and distraction. It's war, so it's not the most pleasant thing. If you get a chance to hit some golf balls as stress relief — psychologically, emotionally, it's a good thing," Epstein said.

Hanna, a commercial litigator who primarily practices in sports and entertainment law, added a school component to the program. Students at 135 schools in about 30 states write letters and send cards to the troops.

"I always imagined it would grow. I knew the charity was going to take off," Hanna said. "But this quickly? I probably would not have guessed as fast as it did."

For more information about the project, visit [bunkersinbaghdad.com](http://bunkersinbaghdad.com).