May 1, 2018

In early 2003, retired Colonel Chris Rodatz, U.S. Marine Corps, and I wanted to do something to recognize and honor today's Marines. Creating the Jacksonville Marine Corps Half Marathon & Freedom 5k has exceeded our wildest expectations, accommodating up to 4,000 runners each year and raising over $650,000 for Jacksonville area military support organizations since the initial race back in October of 2004. It would have been impossible to achieve such results without the incredible hours of volunteer support from many other retired Marines, civilians, corporate partners and, of course, our great U.S. Marines from Blount Island Command , Bravo Company and Marine Corps Security Force Kings Bay.

For the past fourteen years, the Board of the Jacksonville Marine Corps Half Marathon & Freedom 5k has had the honor of leading this special event and realized that it is time to "pass the torch" and rebrand and refresh this special event. As such, we're excited to announce that Mike O'Brien, Executive Director for the Greater Jacksonville Area USO, has accepted the challenge. Mike and the Jacksonville USO Staff and Board of Directors have formally taken ownership of this race. Mike has served on the Board for the Jacksonville Marine Corps Half Marathon & Freedom 5k for the past five years. This event will now be called the USO Armed Forces Half Marathon & Freedom 5k. The 15th annual running of the race will be held on Saturday, October 20, 2018 at Metropolitan Park downtown Jacksonville. Many of the members from the Jacksonville Marine Corps Half Marathon & Freedom 5k have agreed to stay on the committee to help guide and support the Jacksonville USO and this special event. The Jacksonville USO, which serves all branches of the military, is the perfect organization to lead this race into the future!

The Greater Jacksonville Area USO is honored to lead the "rebranded" USO Armed Forces Half Marathon & Freedom 5k. Our vision for this special race is to have every branch of our Armed Forces, including the Florida Army and Air National Guard participating in the race as a team building "esprit de corps" event. Each branch of the service will be setting-up static displays honoring their individual branch of service. This event has served as a vital recruiting opportunity for our U.S. Marine Corps. There is no doubt that it will also serve as a vital recruiting opportunity for all other branches of our Armed Forces as well. The Jacksonville USO also view's this race as a team building event that coincides and complements physical fitness initiatives. Our goal is to have 1,000 or more active duty men and women running in the race promoting their individual teams by wearing command t-shirts.

The City of Jacksonville has agreed to promote the USO Armed Forces Half Marathon & Freedom 5k during their "Season of Valor" activities this fall, and the Jacksonville Jaguars have agreed to be a marketing partner for this marathon. With the City, Jacksonville Jaguars and every branch of our Armed Forces committed to this annual marathon, we believe this special event has the potential to become a national-recognized race in the very foreseeable future.

Semper Fidelis,

Gayward Hendry
Co-founder
Jacksonville Marine Corps Half Marathon & Freedom 5k
USO

Sincerely,

Mike O'Brien
Executive Director
Greater Jacksonville Area