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TIS THE SEASON OF HEROES

A column by Mayor Harry Tutunjian

Tis the season once again for freezing winds, slushy roads and over-crowded stores with parking spots that are miles away from a door. It's also the season to celebrate Christmas or the holiday of belief with the company of friends and family. It's also a time for reflection and to be truly appreciative of the life we, as Americans, are afforded.

We are only afforded that life because of the sacrifices of our military personnel. Here's a very hearty thank you to all the men and women who serve our country in the armed forces. They enthusiastically represent the ideals of our nation by embodying those tenets – hard working, brave, and committed to freedom. They deserve all the praise we give and more.

One such individual is Chief Master Sgt. John Gebhardt, who is the Superintendent of the 22nd Wing Medical Group based in Wichita, KS and assigned to Balad Air Base in Iraq. Chief Master Sgt. Gebhardt recently gained worldwide fame because of a forwarded email chain that includes a photo of him holding an injured Iraqi child.

According to the U.S. Air Force's official publication "the young infant had received extensive gunshot injuries to her head when insurgents attacked her family killing both of her parents and many of her siblings." The child apparently felt comforted by only him and so he would hold her and rock her to sleep.

Closer to home, we have the 42nd Infantry Division. They are our neighbors, friends, and family. Whether they are full-time military personnel or the citizen-soldiers that populate our communities, we thank them for dedicating their lives to the idea that America shouldn't just be about freedom but should stand for freedom also.

It's tough for me to imagine the conditions these men and women – from the support services to frontline combat – must have to experience. I do know that it takes a special skill to be able to sacrifice so much and then give of your self just a bit more. They are heroes indeed.

Back home there are many more heroes. The men and women of our police, emergency medical and fire services strive every day to keep us safe from known and unknown dangers. It's easy to conjure up the image of the firefighter rushing into the black smoke or of the law enforcement officer responding to a call where they don't know what to expect or of the EMT administering the skills they have to keep a family from losing one of their own. They too deserve our profound respect and appreciation for putting their duty above their being.

However, it's not just a career or act that can be "heroic". People like those dedicated servants in the religious community may not rush into burning buildings but they administer the comfort and hope of faith to people who

may not have elsewhere to turn or simply need someone to be there for them. To have that much faith, where you channel it into positive growth and development for others, that's heroic.

A hero is much more than a title you earn by having a job. It's a commitment to always putting the needs and troubles of others ahead of your own.

At this time of year, when Christians gather to celebrate the birth of a man that would someday be their hero, someone who valued others more than Himself and lived as He believed, it is my hope that we try each day to be a little more heroic.

May you have a Merry Christmas and best wishes for the New Year.

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