



One of the Nation's Top Charities "Because Americans Believe in It"

Story by R. R. Keene • Photos by Nancy Lee White Hoffman

Lieutenant General Matthew T. "Terry" Cooper, USMC (Ret) officially opened the doors to Santa's new toy warehouse—the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation National Headquarters' Cooper Center—March 28 in Triangle, Va.

When LtGen Cooper and General James T. Conway, Commandant of the Marine Corps, unveiled the building's plaque, it capped more than 14 years of effort by LtGen Cooper and his staff to bring the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation back from near oblivion.

The foundation suffered in the early 1990s as a result of financial mismanagement. It was then approximately \$1 mil-

lion in debt. When Gen Carl E. Mundy Jr., the CMC at the time, became aware of the situation, he directed an immediate cleanup and recommended LtGen Cooper—who was retiring from the Marine Corps—to become president and chief executive officer of the troubled organization. Gen Mundy's reasoning, in part, was that LtGen Cooper had been commanding general of the Marine Corps Reserve's Fourth Marine Division under which the Toys for Tots efforts fell.

LtGen Cooper was considered by his peers to be a man of principle. He was a decorated career infantry officer with two tours in Vietnam. When he retired in 1993,



The Marine Toys for Tots Foundation finally has the space it needs to conduct business and collect toys for needy children. The new "Cooper Center" opened its doors March 28 in Triangle, Va., on U.S. Highway 1, just up the road from the National Museum of the Marine Corps and Marine Corps Base Quantico.

his resumé included highlights such as being an honor or distinguished graduate from a number of professional military schools and command of major combat units. He was known as a no-nonsense, thorough, thoughtful and tough Marine. Most of all, he was a leader loaded with boundless energy.

"When he came aboard in 1993, he reduced the staff from six people to me and him," said Major William J. "Bill" Grein, USMC (Ret), vice president, marketing and development, Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. "He brought in a new board of directors—successful business leaders in their own right who have all served as

Marines—and we moved in 1994 from Buffalo, N.Y., to Virginia and the Marine Corps Base on Quantico.”

The idea was to immediately put everything above board and restore the public’s and the Marine Corps’ trust. According to a *Washington Post* report after LtGen Cooper took the helm, “He cleaned up the books, suspended the direct-mail campaign and appealed to corporations to return. He apologized for the mess and assured donors that the problems were getting fixed.”

Then he went to work unceasingly to expand and improve Toys for Tots beyond its traditional sponsors and the Marine Corps Reserve units. The result was that the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation made one of the most amazing and greatest roaring comebacks in the history of such charities.

No doubt part of that comeback was the belief by most that Toys for Tots has been a worthwhile endeavor since 1947, providing toys for needy children. Founded by Maj William L. Hendricks, USMCR in Los Angeles, the program was adopted by the Marine Corps in 1948 and expanded nationwide. In 1991, at the behest of the Marine Corps, the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation was created to serve as the fund-raising and support organization for the Toys for Tots Program and became an IRS-recognized 501c(3), not-for-profit, public charity. In 1995, the Secretary of Defense designated Toys for Tots as an official activity of the Marine Corps and an official mission of the Marine Corps Reserve.

In 2007, the foundation supplemented local Toys for Tots campaigns with 4.6 million toys valued at \$44.2 million. From 1991 to 2007, the foundation supplemented the collections of local Toys for Tots campaigns with 74.8 million toys valued at \$431.2 million. “Last year the foundation was ranked 66th in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy’s* ‘Philanthropy 400,’” said Grein. “The foundation also received the *Charity Navigator’s* highest 4-star rating for sound fiscal management and has been designated as an Accredited Charity by the Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance.”

Grein went on: “We have a 97-to-3 program-to-service support ratio on the monetary donations we receive.” That’s part of the reason Toys for Tots attracted 69 national corporate sponsors, 22 corporate donors and 28 national corporate events sponsors last year.

The generosity of sponsors also helped the new Cooper Center, which is a three-story headquarters with 14,000 square feet of office and 7,000 square feet of storage space for a staff of 12.

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“It cost \$6 million and is completely paid for,” said Grein. “We had a capital campaign and raised separate dollars for the building only.”

The opening of the building had been long-planned, but the surprise was the name of the center, which the now retired president and CEO had no idea would be named after him.

The mission of providing toys for less fortunate children worldwide continues to be the main focus of the organization. LtGen Henry P. “Pete” Osman, USMC

and inspiration to needy children through the power of a gift,” LtGen Osman said. “One of the keys to unlocking the door to a brighter and more prosperous future for these children is a good education.”

Working with UPS and Mail Boxes Etc., Toy for Tots will collect \$1 donations for its “Buck a Book” program where every dollar donated will place a book in the hands of economically disadvantaged children. MBE and UPS are donating \$125,000, which will distribute 125,000 books.

On hand for the opening of the new Marine Toys for Tots Foundation headquarters were numerous dignitaries including (from left) Gen William L. “Spider” Nyland, USMC (Ret), chairman of the foundation’s board, and his wife, Brenda; the 34th Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen James T. Conway; Mrs. Bettie Cooper and her husband, LtGen Terry Cooper, USMC (Ret), retired president and CEO of the foundation.



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(Ret) took over in January as the new leader of Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. As energetic as his predecessor, he expanded the charity’s efforts to include a new year-round literacy initiative for the most economically disadvantaged children by providing them direct access to books and educational resources that will enhance their ability to read and communicate effectively.

“The mission of Toys for Tots has always been to deliver a message of hope

LtGen Osman summed up the main reason Toys for Tots weathered the storm of the early 1990s and why it was a success before and a success again today: “Toys for Tots exists because Americans believe in it.”

With the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation, there is always going to be a good Christmas for many children everywhere.

For more information, visit www.toysfortots.org, or call (703) 640-9433.

