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'Christmas Can Cure'

Program gives merry Christmas to Sanpete man injured in Iraq

By Suzanne Dean

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PARK CITY—Two resort operators, with support from an array of businesses and organizations in the Park City area, have given an activity-filled vacation to a Fountain Green family whose father was wounded in Iraq.

Bradley and Chante Chidester and their four daughters spent five days (Dec. 18-22) staying in a condominium, tubing and riding the Heber Creeper's Polar Express, to

and the Silver Star management, among other businesses, a chance to give back to "families who have given so much, who have suffered so much," Lee said.

In 2004, Bradley Chidester, now 27, was a sergeant in the regular Army. He was working as the gunner on a military vehicle when it was struck by a roadside bomb. "He took shrapnel from the waist up," Chante says. His right arm was also burned.

The injuries weren't bad enough to require evacuation



SUZANNE DEAN / MESSENGER PHOTO

name a few activities.

One day, while volunteers took the girls bowling, Chante shopped for a new outfit. Then she and Bradley had a night on the town. The family also had time to relax and be together in their condominium.

The vacation was arranged by Christmas Can Cure, a nonprofit organization founded by Greg Lee, owner of the Eureka Resort Casino in Mesquite, Nev.

A Nevada soldier who was wounded, with his family, also received a vacation.

For every soldier killed during the Vietnam War, two soldiers came home wounded, according to the organization's press release. But in Iraq and Afghanistan, for every fatality, there are nine other casualties. "The need to assist veterans is greater now than at any other time in history," the release said.

Lee was on hand at a flag-raising ceremony Saturday honoring the two families. He said that as a hospitality provider, he believes in the restorative time vacations can provide to families. And putting together a vacation was something he and his staff knew how to do.

The project gave his staff

from the country. He was treated in Iraq and came home with his unit about two weeks later.

He went through physical therapy to regain use of his left arm. The arm still has shrapnel in it, and doctors have told him they can't remove it because of the danger of damaging nerves in the process, leaving his arm paralyzed.

But Bradley says the physical injuries have been nothing compared to the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) he has experienced since returning. He has gone through inpatient treatment and for a time went to counseling three times per week.

When you're in a combat zone, "you can't ever let your guard down," he says. "To try to turn that off after a year is difficult."

He adds that when the brain responds to everyday events with an adrenalin surge, "no one can just tweak it and make it go away."

Both Bradley and Chante grew up in St. George. But they decided Bradley would be better able to recover in a quieter place. So a couple of years ago they moved to Fountain Green, and Bradley started attending Snow College full-time.

Bradley and Chante Chidester of Fountain Green with their four daughters (bottom to top—Madison, Mickell, Brianna and Sierra) pose on the steps of the Miner's Hospital in Park City, now a library, following a flag-raising service honoring Bradley's service in Iraq. He was injured by a roadside bomb and has struggled with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). A nonprofit organization called Christmas Can Cure gave the family a five-day vacation in the Park City area.

"We love Fountain Green. We love the whole Sanpete Valley," Bradley says.

Bradley has been involved with a veterans organization called Wounded Warriors. Several weeks ago, a representative called and told Bradley about the Christmas Can Cure program. The representative gathered information about his family and his military service. A few days later, the Chidesters got another call telling them they'd been selected.

When they arrived in Park City, they were taken to their vacation condo, which had a Christmas tree inside. The tree was decorated with ornaments made by elementary children in Park City. Inside the unit were letters from the children thanking the family for their service to the country. That evening, the family went to dinner with owners of the two sponsoring resorts.

The next day, Saturday,

the family rode in a motorcade escorted by the Park City Police Department to the Miner's Hospital in Park City, now the city library, where Scouts officiated over a flag-raising ceremony.

The ceremony kicked off four days of indoor and outdoor activities. The Chidesters, along with the Nevada family, were also honored at an appreciation reception Monday night.

Bradley is two classes shy of graduating from Snow. After that, he plans to transfer to Utah State University to finish his bachelor's. As a Purple Heart recipient, he can receive free tuition at Utah state institutions through his master's degree.

When Bradley was discharged, the Chidesters were living in Washington State. One reason they returned to Utah, Chante says, was the support Utahns show for veterans and the benefits the state provides.

"Utah really treats its veterans well," she says.