

## Torrance Hometown Heroes Military Recognition Program

Torrance resident Ellen Ozima acknowledges she goes out of her way to drive down Torrance Boulevard a bit more these days.

She likes to see the recently installed banner picturing her daughter, North High School graduate and Air Force Maj. Jaime Okamura, who is stationed at Hickam AFB on Oahu.

Thirty-two banners in total depicting Torrance residents with military ties are hanging from streetlight poles in front of City Hall as part of the first three phases of the Hometown Heroes Military Banner Recognition Program.

Relatives, friends or sponsors paid the \$220 per-banner costs.

"Number one, it's pride," Ozima said of her participation in the program. "My daughter knows how much I love her, but now I get to tell everyone

Torrance erected the first 10 banners from street poles in front of City Hall in its new Hometown Heroes Military Banner Recognition Program in July of 2012. Since then, there have been two more phases, and 22 more banners introduced. The banners were displayed during this year's Armed Forces Day Parade.

It's an apt program for a city that has always proudly declared its support for military personnel. Torrance is home to the nation's longest running municipal Armed Forces Day Celebration, which it has marked for more than 50 years.

The idea is to honor active duty military personnel, as well as living and deceased veterans.

"As a community we can't stop trying to honor these people who do give us these rights we take for granted," stated Mayor Frank Scotto.

Among those honored on a banner is Army Sgt. Brian M. Wood, who died in 2004 in Iraq at the age of 21 when his military vehicle hit a mine.

Judy Gibson, whose son Brock attended kindergarten through 12th grade with Brian Wood's sister, asked Torrance's Scott Robinson Honda car dealership to pay for the banner.

"I was so proud and thrilled we could have something," she said. "Brian was one I saw grow up. I am so pleased and satisfied that got done."

The Torrance Amateur Radio Association also sponsored a banner for one of its own, the late John Kemper, who died at age 88 in April. The association provides communication services to the Torrance Police Department during natural disasters and other emergencies as needed.

An avid ham radio operator his entire life, Kemper was a Morse code operator and U.S. Army intelligence unit member during World War II.

"He did a lot for the organization and I thought the organization might want to do something back for him," said the group's director, Chuck Galbasin. "I think he would have been very proud."

With each phase installation, Mayor and Council hold a public presentation for the friends, families and sponsors of the banners at a Council Meeting, where framed souvenir photos are presented to the families.

The program is currently accepting applications for the fourth phase of the program, which is coordinated by the City Manager's Office. For applications and inquiries, please contact the office at (310) 618-5800 or visit [www.TorranceCA.gov/HometownHeroes.htm](http://www.TorranceCA.gov/HometownHeroes.htm).

