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CONNECTICUT FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION KICKS OFF STATEWIDE EFFORT TO HELP CONNECTICUT NATIONAL GUARD'S *OPERATION E.L.F.*'S GIFT CARD DRIVE

HARTFORD, CONN., February 1, 2006 – It's a fact that is faced by too many charitable causes: donations from the public might be plentiful during the holiday season, but sparse throughout the rest of the year when the need can be the greatest. That is why **today** the **Connecticut Funeral Directors Association (CFDA)** is **kicking off a statewide gift card collection drive to help *Operation E.L.F.*** (Embracing Lonely Families), which provides support to families of Connecticut National Guard troops on active duty in a variety of ways.

CFDA members are stepping forward to raise awareness and donations for **Operation E.L.F.'s Gift Card Program**, which is **managed by the Connecticut National Guard's Family Program Office**. The Wethersfield, Conn.-based professional association of more than 220 funeral homes is urging its members and the public to donate gift cards purchased at stores and gas stations that will be given to families-in-need who have Connecticut National Guard members overseas. The families then can choose what everyday necessities they need most for their households.

"Right now, more than 550 Connecticut National Guardsmen and women are mobilized and deployed overseas and many of them are their family's primary wage earner," explains Lt. Col. John Whitford, spokesman for the Connecticut National Guard. "With ongoing support, the families can continue to receive the necessary assistance that they may need during a potentially difficult time."

"When we learned that donations of gift cards to Operation E.L.F. had declined dramatically in the past few weeks since the holiday season, the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association wanted to take immediate action to help," explains Rodney L. Bourdeau, CFSP, President of the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association. "We encourage Connecticut residents, businesses and civic organizations to join our members in purchasing gift cards for grocery stores, department stores, and gas stations, and sending the cards to the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association headquarters in Wethersfield. We are working closely with Operation E.L.F. to make sure that the cards we receive will be distributed to Connecticut National Guard families all year long." In addition to collecting cards from the general public, individual funeral directors will reach out to civic groups in their own communities, seeking donations of gift cards, and make personal contributions of gift cards to support the effort.

It is easy to join the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association's statewide drive for Operation E.L.F.'s gift card program for Connecticut National Guard's families in need: **-More-**

CONN. FUNERAL DIRECTORS ASSOC. KICKS OFF *OPERATION E.L.F.* GIFT CARD DRIVE...2

- 1) Purchase a gift card of any value at Connecticut grocery stores, department stores, gas stations, or pharmacies. Gift cards for many Connecticut stores also may be purchased on line. Operation E.L.F. staff says that gift cards of any dollar value are welcomed and appreciated.
- 2) Mail the gift card directly to:

Connecticut Funeral Directors Association
Operation E.L.F. Project
364 Silas Deane Hwy.
Wethersfield, CT 06109

CFDA will deliver all gift cards it receives directly to Operation E.L.F. on a regular basis to ensure that they can be used by Connecticut National Guard families as soon as possible.

“It is our honor to assist our Connecticut neighbors who need a helping hand right now,” says Bourdeau. “As funeral directors, we provide support to families during their most difficult times, so we know the importance of this type of program. And, as individuals with families of our own, we understand its value on an even more personal level.”

The Connecticut Funeral Directors Association (CFDA) is comprised of funeral directors at more than 220 funeral homes. It is committed to the promotion and advocacy of high ethical standards in funeral services. Its Operation E.L.F. outreach project is only the latest of the association’s community efforts. CFDA members are very active in civic and business organizations in the communities they serve. The association currently is accepting applications for its 2006 “Family Support Services Scholarship” program which presents college scholarships to Connecticut high school seniors who are pursuing careers in a profession that provides emotional or medical support for families. Over the past decade, CFDA has mounted drives to collect clothing and donations for emergency disaster efforts, has hosted community blood drives, and several years ago, funeral homes around the state opened their doors to the public to collect supplies for the American Red Cross, Foodshare and the Connecticut Food Bank. Founded in 1889, the Wethersfield, Conn.-based association develops and presents ongoing professional training opportunities for practitioners and educational programs for association members. **For more information about the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association or its new Operation E.L.F. Gift Card Collection Drive**, call 860-721-0234 or 800-919-2332 or visit <http://www.ctfda.org>.

Operation E.L.F. was established in 2003 by then-Lieutenant Governor M. Jodi Rell as a sincere gesture of support to military families who were separated during the holiday season due to deployment, and also were potentially suffering tremendous financial hardship as a result of their call to active duty. In addition to this gift card program, Operation E.L.F. generates thousands of new, unwrapped toys, seasonal services and monetary contributions to the Connecticut National Guard Foundation, Inc. For information about Operation E.L.F. and how to donate funds, visit <http://www.operationelf.com> or call 800-858-2677. -End-