



## Reservists donate time to charity

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11/29/2007 - **MCHORD AIR FORCE BASE, Wash.** -- Super heroes by definition are people endowed with superhuman powers, usually used in fighting evil, saving lives and ultimately, changing the world.

Every McChord Reservist could fit that description, including three Reservists who have gone completely different routes to help change the world.

Tech. Sgt. Christopher Hamel's route leads him around the world to help people. He is a volunteer with Volunteer Medics Worldwide, a non-profit, non-government agency run by another Reservist in Kokoma, Ind.



Master Sgt. Neal Therrien, 446th Mission Support Squadron, is a WHALE of a volunteer. But he is just one in an ocean of volunteers in the Air Force Reserve at McChord Air Force Base, Wash.

"We do humanitarian medical relief missions around the world at our own expense," said Sergeant Hamel, 446th Aeromedical Staging Squadron. "We also do disaster assistance work, such as the tsunami, hurricanes and wildfires."

Volunteer Medics Worldwide is made up of nurses, emergency medical technicians, medics, doctors, pilots and teachers who all work without salary and pay their own expenses to get to and stay at the designated locations. They provide basic medical care, food and education to those in troubled times.

Sergeant Hamel's first mission was to Ethiopia for one month where people had been waiting days for them to arrive.

"I found it very challenging to work with a culture completely different from my own for long days, often under far less than ideal conditions. Often there were far too many for us to treat," said Sergeant Hamel. "It is one of the most life-changing events that I can ever remember."

Closer to home, Master Sgt. Neal Therrien, 446th Mission Support Squadron, helps save lives through the Internet. He is the webmaster for the WHALE program.

The acronym WHALE stands for "We Have A Little Emergency." It is an identification program which provides rescuers with pertinent information about children riding in car seats who are involved in vehicle accidents and the adult in the vehicle is seriously injured or unable to talk.

Informational stickers are placed on both rear side windows of the car and on both sides of the child safety seat so emergency workers will know immediately that there is vital information pertaining to the child on the back of the car seat. The WHALE car sticker contains the child's name, medical history, names and phone numbers of two guardians and up to three other emergency names and phone numbers. The program is used by emergency workers in 34 states, including Washington.

"I launched the Web site in 2005, after seeing WHALE kits on an information table at a local baby store," said Sergeant Therrien, who has four children of his own. "The purpose of the Web site was to centralize all the different WHALE programs. Over half the states had programs in place, but no centralized data base. I developed the Web site to do just that. As this site grows, and new programs are added, I update the site with the new information."

For the last five years, Staff Sgt. Hope Funderbunk, 446th Airlift Control Flight, has also been working with mothers and their children. She focuses her attention on families in the Tacoma area.

Sergeant Funderbunk works with an organization called Phoenix Housing. It's a women's and children's shelter that helps families with bad circumstances.

"My family and I try to do something big over the holidays since we feel so blessed," said Sergeant Funderbunk, who adopted five moms during one Christmas season. "I spoil the kids as best I can, because everyone

deserves to have a good Christmas."

Sergeant Funderbunk became involved because she believes that sometimes good people fall on hard times.

"I believe if you have been blessed in your life, that you should in turn bestow some of that blessing on those who are less fortunate," said Sergeant Funderbunk.

"My parents came from humble beginnings, they really wanted my brother and I to appreciate what we had. I'm not well to do, but I live comfortably and if I have to give up shopping or dinners out to put a smile on a child's face, it is well worth the sacrifice."

Sacrifice, caring, and giving is something Reservists and super heroes know well.

Although these three Reservists don't have superhuman powers, they have gone to great lengths and places to save lives and ultimately, change the world.