

# Livingston County Veteran of The Year

**GARY DUNN – Director Toys for Tots**

**Marine Corp League - David Murnighan Det. 161**

Gary joined the U.S. Marine Corps in December 1967. He completed Recruit Training at MCRD San Diego. He was transferred to Camp Pendleton for additional ITR Training. He received orders to report to Camp Lejeune for training as a Disbursing Clerk. Following this, he was assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, Headquarters Battalion as a Payroll Disbursing Clerk. After a short tour at Headquarters Company, Gary was transferred to Headquarters Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division, Da Nang, South Vietnam. Da Nang was a very short stay as Gary was sent to LZ Baldy, south of Da Nang, where he spent the balance of his tour.

In December 1973 he was discharged from military service and moved to Michigan. He found work at a local factory. Management noticed his leadership skills that he acquired from the military which, lead to a superintendent promotion and a transfer to Kendallville, Indiana. He was drawn to help others during his 8 years living in the city of Kendallville and before moving back to Michigan in 1987. The family supported his participation in community service groups such as:

1. 1<sup>st</sup> Class paid volunteer fire-fighter, Rome City
2. Noble County EMS Department Membership
3. Reservist, Rome City Police Department.

In 2004, Gary joined the Marine Corps League David Murnighan Detachment 161 located in Howell, Michigan. Since joining the league, he has shared and provided his win-win attitude with everyone he meets. He is not the type of person to just participate but rather the person who wishes to get involved in the affairs of MCL and the surrounding community such as:

1. Three years Paymaster
2. Two years as Vice Commandant
3. Five years as Commandant
4. MCL Balloon Festival Booth until 2016
5. Member of the MCL Honor Guard
6. Active participant for the Marine Corp Ball
7. Toys for Tots National Trainer
8. Michigan State Liaison Officer "Toys for Tots"
9. Howell Veterans Organization (HVO)
10. Sgt. Auxiliary Police, Inkster, MI 11yrs

Gary has been chairman of the Toys for Tots in Livingston County since 2004 and recently promoted to District Manager and Trainer for Toys for Tots. The Afghan, and Iraqi war lasted 20 years. Gary has been providing Christmas toys to children of veterans and non-veteran families for the past 17 years. In the beginning the first four years, Livingston County Toys for Tots was part of the Marine Corps Reserve Center located in Lansing, MI. as a Sub-Unit of their program. In 2008, the Livingston County location became an independent unit reporting directly to the Toys for Tots Foundation. Gary has built with the help of many volunteers the "Toys for Tots Train Float" and participates in "Fantasy of Lights Parade" in Howell and the "Festival in the Ville Parade" held at Fowlerville, Michigan. This float has won the Grand Marshall's Award twice.

In recent years the "Toys for Tots" Program has expanded under the direction of Gary to update gifts for children ages 9 thru 16 to include electronic devices. In 2019 at the Brighton Ford Dealership the Knights of Columbus Council 2659 donated the first in a series of annual checks starting at \$750.00 to help jump start this program. John King, News Director WHMI was the first reporter to interview Gary about this new program. Steve Horton, (Owner) Fowlerville News has followed the progress of this program since 2019.

Brighton Ford established a fund raiser for local elementary schools for the best Holiday Painting for their showroom windows. The first-place painting will receive \$3000, 2<sup>nd</sup> place \$1000, and 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> place will receive \$500. These winning awards will be given to that schools Art Department. The team of Lauren Coffman, Director of Marketing and John Cueter, General Manager of Brighton Ford are a major promoter for Toys for Tots. They consult with Gary on occasion to improve donations during the Christmas Holiday. In fact, Lauren Coffman informed the writer that Brighton Ford completely redecorates the service center to reflect the holiday season. In addition, the dealership launched a program so donors for "Toy for Tots" could drive through the service center unload their donations and the families could enjoy the many exhibits, live holiday characters, holiday music and finally wave to Santa & Mrs. Claus as they exit the service center.

This Christmas caravan includes many local schools, individuals, local business owners and veteran families. The purpose of this program is to fill the box truck with gifts from the community. Lauren indicated since the pandemic donations have more than doubled. People have shared in this event and have traveled up to 40 miles to participate for this special occasion. Once the box truck is filled it will be taken to the warehouse where Gary and the volunteers will categorize each gift by age and group them for final distribution.

In 2021, Toys for Tots distributed 31,000 gifts prior the Christmas Holiday from the Salvation Army Warehouse. That is approximately more than 2100 veteran and non-veteran families. It should be noted, Gary or a volunteer will meet with a family member and let them pick the toys for their children. A pickup date will be assigned, and the toys are packaged. In addition, Gary has worked with the Salvation Army as a 50-50 partner for the last four years to ensure these families receive food for the holiday season.

Gary has continued to be active in both community and veteran affairs in Livingston County. He has donated many hours and personal resources to Toys for Tots in Livingston County. It is with a great honor that we nominate and elect Gary Dunn as the 2022 Livingston County Veteran of The Year.

**Respectfully Submitted By:**

*Larry Gulick*

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Marine Corp League 161 Marine Corps League 161

*David J. Mester*

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Commandant Senior Vice Commandant