

THE FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP ONLINE

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'Lt. Dan' shows support for troops, Iraqi children

by Scott Thompson, Staff Writer

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One song into the Lt. Dan Band's concert, Gary Sinise gave the audience instructions.

"C'mon up here!" said the actor/musician, who performed with his band Feb. 23 at the Frontier Conference Center.

Members of the Fort Leavenworth community took Sinise's instruction, made their way to the dance floor in front of the stage and stayed there until the concert finished three hours later. The show was sponsored by TriWest Healthcare Alliance.



Gary Sinise plays the bass guitar during the Lt. Dan Band concert Feb. 23 at the Frontier Conference Center. Lamp photo by Tisha Johnson.

Sinise took the stage to a standing ovation, wearing a gray Army Physical Fitness uniform T-shirt. The concert's set list included songs by artists like Linkin Park, Patti LaBelle, Keith Urban, The Who and Rolling Stones. Stevie Wonder's "Uptight" was the first song played. Later, band member Gina Gonzalez performed her original song, "A Letter Home."

Band director Kimo Williams told a story about his experiences as a Soldier in the Vietnam War. During his time there, Williams would entertain his colleagues with songs, and during a rendition of Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze," the enemy attacked. His amplifier was destroyed in the attack, and Williams said he assumed they didn't like the song.

Fort Leavenworth did, however, along with the other songs played during the concert. Sinise addressed the audience throughout the show and routinely pulled people on stage. Much of the audience spent the entire concert on their feet, with some dancing in front and others listening as they stood at their seats.

The Lt. Dan Band has performed more than 40 shows over the past three years, including four USO tours. The band is named after the "Lieutenant Dan" character Sinise portrayed in the 1994 film "Forrest Gump", a role that earned Sinise an Oscar nomination for best supporting actor.

Sinise's day in the area began in north Kansas City, where Sinise met with People to People International employees who were assembling school kits for his not-for-profit organization Operation Iraqi Children. Sinise toured the organization's warehouse there and met with its staff, thanking them for their work.

Three Soldiers from Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers represented Fort Leavenworth. Sgt. Rafael Gilbert, Spc. Carl Gustafson and BOSS President Spc. Debra Myers helped prepare kits for shipment by affixing stickers to packets and filling them with school supplies.



The three said they enjoyed the experience.

"I didn't know that something like this even existed," Gilbert said. "It's great."

In 2004, Sinise co-founded Operation Iraqi Children with author Laura Hillenbrand, who is possibly best known for penning "Seabiscuit: An American Legend."

The organization, which works in a partnership with People to People, collects and distributes school supplies to the children of Iraq as an act of goodwill. In two years of operation, OIC has sent more than 300,000 supply kits overseas as well as hundreds of stuffed animals, sports equipment, shoes and blankets.

Each school supply kit sent to Iraq includes three folders, a package of notebook paper, a composition book, 12 new No. 2 pencils, a box of colored pencils, a pencil bag, a 12-inch ruler, a pair of blunt-end scissors, a pencil sharpener and a large eraser.

Kristine Knutter, youth program coordinator for People to People, was one

Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers Spc. Carl Gustafson, Sgt. Rafael Gilbert and Spc. Debra Myers label bags to be filled with school supplies for Iraqi children. BOSS and People to People International volunteers packaged the Operation Iraqi Children kits

of about a dozen employees who helped assemble kits. She said employees from the organization, which was founded by Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1956, routinely make these types of trips.

"We're always supportive when he (Sinise) comes to town," Knutter said. "It's nice to get out of the office and do something hands-on."

Feb.
23
at
a
warehouse
in
Kansas
City,
Mo.
Lamp
photo
by
Jeff
Crawley.

Following the evening show, Garrison Commander Col. Timothy Weathersbee gave Sinise a framed piece that showed photographs of Fort Leavenworth's historic sites.

"On behalf of (Brig.) General (Mark) O'Neill and the Fort Leavenworth community, I thank TriWest for sponsoring this event and, of course, a tremendous thanks to Gary Sinise and the Lt. Dan Band for their first-class entertainment," Weathersbee said.

Sinise thanked Weathersbee for the gift, and asked the audience to continue supporting the troops, saying it was the primary reason the Lt. Dan Band does what it does.

"It's important to remember that, no matter where you sit politically in this nation, that there are a lot of people out there putting themselves in harm's way for you," said Sinise, who spent the night at Fort Leavenworth's Hoge Barracks.

For more information on Operation Iraqi Children, visit www.operationiraqichildren.org. Information about the Lt. Dan Band can be found at www.ltdanband.com.

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