

THE HEART OF Kernersville

by NJ Clausen

November...the month of gratitude and thanksgiving for our many blessings, and appreciation for those men and women who protected our country with military service. This month I have the pleasure of introducing you to a man who answered the call to serve, Doug Szaro.

Born in New Jersey, Doug grew up with an older sister and a younger brother. He remembers spending much of his childhood outside riding his bike or taking walks. When in high school, he was a guard and linebacker on the football team, and a catcher for the baseball team.

After high school, Doug worked in construction, and after a couple of



years, moved from New Jersey to Florida. As he was driving up the highway on the 4th of July, watching the fireworks go off, Doug decided that he was going into the Marine Corps. A friend's brother was in the Marine Corps and also worked on the construction site with Doug; looking at him and seeing how hard he worked, Doug said to himself, "I know I could do that." At 21 years of age, he signed up and began Marine training in South Carolina.

Boot camp was different back when he trained, the drill instructors liked to mess with your mind—getting in your face and hitting to make a point. As Doug was 3 or 4 years older than the other recruits (who looked up to him), the instructors wanted to make sure Doug knew who was in charge, which he did! He was determined to make it through the 13 weeks of training, and from there he went to

school in Tennessee and learned how to fix helicopters. Doug worked for a year at different schools before he was assigned as crew chief mechanic on a helicopter in North Carolina. Pilots would rotate, but he stayed with that helicopter, a 46 with twin rotors which carried troops and cargo. In two and a half years, Doug had over a thousand flight hours and had earned a reputation for having his helicopter serviced and ready. They were deployed to go to the Mediterranean in October 1983 but got turned south to go down to Grenada to rescue students at the medical college and avoid a hostage situation. Making numerous trips, they brought the students to the airfield at Point Salines. Ten days later they relieved troops that had been in Beirut during the bombings, staying in Beirut for the next five months. Doug shared how he was in the one helicopter that got ambushed in a parking lot. Over 200 rounds were fired at them,

but not one damaged the helicopter; although, a report had been sent that the helicopter had been shot down and all were dead! After a brief return to North Carolina, they went back to Beirut for peacekeeping.

After active service, Doug returned to construction, living in Kernersville, and working as a carpenter. Through his work, Doug met Teresa, and they got married. He was soon running construction jobs as a superintendent; one of his biggest jobs was turning the old library at the School of the Arts into offices. Doug recalled the challenge of removing 23 trees during the week of spring break when students and faculty were off campus, as previously teachers had tied themselves to trees to prevent removal! Doug also coached girls' softball for a time, which he would have continued if not for parental interference and the practice of awarding everyone a trophy.

Doug has been actively involved in the disaster relief efforts at the Kernersville VFW location to assist those in the western part of the state. The location is a staging area, with the donations coming from all over the state and county. He spoke of the VFW Post in Virginia that brought down 3 trailer loads! Doug stated that Marines, Army, Navy Seals, and rescue workers have been looking for people. Diapers, baby wipes, formula, dry goods, canned food, water, blankets, and medical supplies are among the most needed items.

When asked if he had anything he would like to share, Doug said that it is a shame that it takes a disaster for people to pull together. There are more people in this country that need help than overseas, we need to keep it in house.

