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You are here: US > Search > [Tillman Foundation reinforces positive message in salute](#)

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## Tillman Foundation reinforces positive message in salute

Craig McGuire - 16 Sep 2005 22:00

**When Pat Tillman turned down a three-year, \$3.6 million contract with the NFL's Arizona Cardinals to enlist as an Army Ranger following 9/11, he inspired the nation. When he was killed in a firefight in Afghanistan, he became a hero.**

To honor his memory, his family created The Pat Tillman Foundation, tapping Gordon C. James Public Relations (GCJ) to help plan and publicize events encouraging others to follow Tillman's selfless example.

### Strategy

In its first year of operation, the foundation debuted two events designed to honor Tillman's memory and generate funds for the Leadership Through Action (LTA) program.

Established at Arizona State University (ASU), Tillman's alma mater, the LTA program involves projects, courses, and mentorship to inspire students to make positive changes both in themselves and their communities.

The larger of the two events was Pat Tillman Night with the Arizona Diamondbacks, held April 22, 2005. Two weeks before that event, a group of Tillman's ASU friends organized Pat's Run, a 4.2-mile charity footrace.

"We were focused on making sure we celebrated Pat's life and the positive aspects of his legacy," says Alex Garwood, Tillman's brother-in-law and the foundation's executive director. "It was paramount that we not get caught up in any of the media-induced negativity [surrounding the war in Iraq]."

### Tactics

The Diamondbacks event coincided with the first anniversary of Tillman's death. With no football played that time of year, baseball was considered a suitable alternative, as the family wanted the recognition to be held on the date of his death.

"We had a limited [six-week] time frame and a list of key tasks: create an event, raise funds, and manage the media," says Gregg Edgar, SAE at GCJ. "This included videos remembering his life, a flyover of Apache helicopters, and a silent first pitch ceremony using a football."

Pat Tillman Night was publicized locally in a partnership with the Diamondbacks, which used its regular outlets to encourage attendance, while GCJ used its media contacts to place print, radio, and TV spots.

Brochures were printed, and a special kiosk was set up at the game to inform attendees about Tillman and LTA. GCJ and organizers did not solicit money directly from attendees,

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instead providing information in the brochure on how to contribute.

But they pursued crucial donor support through GCJ's contacts with prominent businesses and used direct marketing to create community awareness.

The event included a salute to all American veterans, an awards ceremony for the winners of Pat's Run, and a sponsor reception.

Then it was time to play ball.

## Results

Approximately 30,000 people attended the game, and the agency handed out about 1,500 LTA fliers.

As far as fundraising efforts, such corporations as Thompson Industries, TTI, Shamrock, DeGreen Financial, Harkins Theatres, Clear Channel, and the Cardinals pitched in \$84,000. Plus, more than 5,000 people turned out for Pat's Run.

GCJ estimates, based on circulation statistics, that media coverage generated by the events reached 12.6 million people. National news outlets like ABC, CNN, and NBC, covered the event, as did local outlets, such as CBS affiliate KPHO, NBC affiliate KPNX, Fox affiliate KSAZ, and independent channel KTVK.

"Being new to the game, we need to rely on the expertise of others in the areas we are inexperienced [in]," Garwood says. "GCJ rode shotgun for us and guided us through."

**Future** With GCJ as its AOR, the foundation intends to expand the LTA program to other colleges and will continue holding events like Pat's Run to honor Tillman's memory.

**PR team:** Gordon C. James Public Relations (Phoenix) and the Pat Tillman Foundation (San Jose, CA) **Campaign:** Pat Tillman Night with the Arizona Diamondbacks; Pat's Run **Time frame:** March through April 2005 **Budget:** \$10,000

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