FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
June 9, 2011

OPERATION WAYPOINT GOES NATIONAL
WITH GPS FOR TROOPS WEBSITE

Non-Profit Provides GPS Guidance for Safety of American Soldiers
Preparing for Active Duty in the Middle East

St. Augusta, Minn. – Operation Waypoint, a Minnesota-based, non-profit program administered by the St. Augusta American Legion Women’s Auxiliary Post 621, announced today the broadening of its program from a state and regional focus to national in scope with its new website, gpsfortroops.org.

Fully run by dedicated volunteers, the program is committed to increasing the safety of military men and women deploying to the Middle East with the guidance of highly accurate, handheld GPS units and mapping cards for Iraq and Afghanistan. Since its inception, Operation Waypoint has relied heavily on its partnership with Lowrance, a leading GPS navigation systems brand, to provide GPS products and charts to soldiers preparing to serve, as well as generous donations from service and social organizations, and numerous individuals to fund the effort. The redesigned Operation Waypoint website will build awareness for the organization’s work, making it easier for visitors to donate and encourage other organizations to become partners in the project to provide GPS devices for soldiers in their own communities.

Operation Waypoint was started in 2005 by retired educator Ed Meyer after a former student, preparing for deployment to Iraq, contacted him to ask what type of GPS unit would be best for his mission. As the military only provides one GPS device per unit, which is usually mounted in a vehicle, Meyer contacted a friend at Lowrance, requested three GPS handheld devices, and trained the company commander and two former students how to use them. Shortly after the soldiers arrived in Iraq, while traveling at night, their 24-vehicle convoy took a wrong turn into a very dangerous Baghdad neighborhood following the lead truck’s Army-issued GPS unit. Realizing the mistake, the convoy commander called Sgt. Gaylen Heacock, one of the soldiers equipped with a Lowrance GPS supplied by Meyer. Heacock’s device determined the correct route and was able to guide the convoy to safety. Upon hearing of how the Lowrance units aided in safety, Meyer worked through the American Legion Auxiliary and Post 621 to broaden the idea into a full not-for-profit program.

“Our goal is to spearhead an even larger movement where communities nationwide can directly support our troops in a very meaningful way,” said Meyer. “I believe that every soldier that feels a GPS would aid them in their mission in the Middle East should have one with them.”

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With the enhancement of GPS accuracy and advanced features, today’s GPS units are even better suited to the challenges often seen by the military than when the program began. Operation Waypoint provides soldiers with Lowrance Endura Safari handheld GPS units that contain a precision GPS+WAAS antenna with 42-channel receiver and 3-axis magnetic compass to ensure troops have pinpoint accuracy for proper guidance or calling in air support when needed. The combination of the touchscreen, simple menus, and the ability to control one-handed or with gloves, keeps usability fast and seamless. However, the most important benefit is the ability to store up to 2000 waypoints for areas of safe passage, suspected insurgent buildings, and other items that are marked and identified with any of 193 different icons and then shared between GPS units over time or added to satellite maps.

“The [GPS] unit helped insure the safety of crews while running convoys through the worst part of Iraq,” said Sgt. Heacock. “It’s helpful in pinpointing causality evacuation points and points of hostile action.”

To date, Operation Waypoint is responsible for delivering over 200 handheld devices into the hands of deploying soldiers. The St. Augusta American Legion accepts donations for Operation Waypoint and purchases its Endura Safari handheld GPS units directly from Lowrance. Lowrance also provides permission for the organization to copy and encrypt its Middle East mapping onto locally sourced microSD cards. While more work, this avoids packaging and operational overhead costs that would normally be seen by a manufacturer. Once the GPS and mapping cards are prepared, each participating soldier is personally trained on the GPS and mapping prior to his or her taking it overseas.

“Each Lowrance GPS and chart card costs $115 after corporate discounts are factored in,” continued Meyer. “Unfortunately, there are still times when we can’t purchase enough units. I have even given my personal GPS away, because I can’t imagine turning down a brave solider. The challenge, as with most non-profits, is maintaining enough donations to support the program effectively.”

Operation Waypoint seeks to grow nationally by working with other American Legion Posts and organizations with a goal to provide a GPS unit to every deployed unit. For more information on Operation Waypoint, to make a donation or learn about other ways to support the organization’s work, please visit www.gpsfortroops.org or contact (320) 252-6693.

About GPS For Troops: Based in St. Augusta, Minnesota, GPS For Troops is a non-profit organization dedicated to building Operation Waypoint, a program that provides GPS handheld devices to American soldiers serving in the Middle East to ensure the safest possible deployment. www.gpsfortroops.org

About Lowrance: The Lowrance® brand is wholly owned by Navico, Inc., a privately held, international marine electronics company. Navico is currently the world’s largest marine electronics company, and is the parent company to leading marine electronics brands: Lowrance, Simrad and B&G. Navico has approximately 1,500 employees globally and distribution in more than 100 countries worldwide. www.navico.com
Operation Waypoint GPS Handheld Recipients

Troops GPS Handheld Training With Ed Meyer

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