



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 2, 2009

### **U.S. Air Force Base Dining Facility Proves People with Disabilities Have Abilities**

Majority of employees at an Air Force dining facility are disabled, but show they're the Best of the Best after winning prestigious Air Force competition.

(Albuquerque, NM) – The Thunderbird Inn dining facility at Kirtland Air Force Base in Albuquerque, New Mexico has for the third time been awarded the prestigious John L. Hennessey Award for exceptional military foodservice operations. But, there is something very unique about this dining facility. Of the inn's 49 employees, 29 suffer from a disability, including the contractor.

“The disabilities range from major amputee to developmental,” says Robert Vick, owner of Vick Vittles which operates and manages the Thunderbird Inn. “Many of us would not have the opportunity to serve our country as the men and women in uniform do. However, Kirtland Air Force Base has given us the great honor of serving our country by taking care of those who defend our freedoms.”

Vick, who is also the president of the New Mexico International Food Service Executives Association, was left blind when he was assaulted nearly 25 years ago. “I can see light and shadows, but that's about it,” says Vick. He adds his disability has never stood in the way of his dreams. “This win proves that having a disability has no bearing on the ability to succeed. If you have the drive you can accomplish just about anything. I hope our success will help employers view people with disabilities as people with abilities.”

The Thunderbird Inn team competed against 168 other military dining facilities for the honor. During a normal day, Vick and his team stay busy dishing out 1,100 meals for breakfast, lunch, dinner and a midnight meal. The menu varies each day but favorites include lasagna, baked fish, prime rib, and of course the freshly baked pies, cakes, and pastries. The team not only strives to serve the best quality, nutritious, and tasty meals, but also focuses on having the cleanest, most efficient, and state-of-the-art facility in the Air Force.

“We start every day as if it's a competition. It's easier and cheaper to keep the highest levels of operation and standards each and every day, rather than spend a lot of money to gear up before a competition,” says Vick.

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Vick and his team were awarded the 2009 John L. Hennessey trophy in Chicago, Illinois on Saturday, May 16, 2009. The Thunderbird Inn has also won the award in 1999 as a military operated facility and in 2005 as a Vick's Vittles contracted facility.

“Kirtland Air Force Base’s leadership and the 377<sup>th</sup> Services Staff have given me an opportunity, by not just awarding me a contract to operate the Thunderbird Inn, but to work with me as an equal, and as a professional in my profession,” said Vick.

#### **About the John L. Hennessey Award**

Established in 1957 and named for the late John L. Hennessey, a hotel and restaurant executive, the award is an annual competition between Air Force installations for the best foodservice programs in the United States Air Force. To win, an installation must exhibit sustained excellence in foodservice management, force readiness support, food quality, employee and customer relations, resource conservation, training, and safety. About 168 Air Force installations are critiqued by military foodservice travelers from several industry associations including the International Food Service Executives Association, National Restaurant Association, Society of Food Service Managers, and Air Force Food Service Agency.

For more information please visit [www.hennesseyaward.org](http://www.hennesseyaward.org)

#### **About International Food Service Executives Association (IFSEA)**

The International Food Service Executives Association is a professional organization of more than one thousand professionals world-wide from the foodservice and hospitality industry. Established in 1901, IFSEA is the industry’s oldest professional association. IFSEA’s mission is to enhance the careers of its members through professional and personal development by providing professional certification, educational opportunities, networking, mentoring, and community service. Activities also include international conferences, culinary competitions, food service excellence awards, student development, food safety education, and much more.

IFSEA has been a proud partner of the U.S. Military for more than 50 years. The association assists the joint services of the Army, Navy, and Military Sealift Command by providing evaluations of Military food service programs, educational food classes, culinary competitions, and the Military Awards for Culinary Excellence.

For more information on IFSEA, please visit [www.IFSEA.com](http://www.IFSEA.com).

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