

# **Mission: American Gratitude – A Hero's Welcome**

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**Local Hero, Cpl. Jordan Cook, surprised by extravagant welcome home ceremony**



**GODFREY** - Hundreds of local patriots gathered Sunday, Jan. 4, at North Elementary School in Godfrey to welcome home a native hero, Cpl. Jordan A. Cook, after serving four honorable years in the United States Marine Corps.

Just as a VIP would arrive, Cook pulled up at the school at approximately 2 p.m., embedded in a convoy of police officers and other emergency vehicles with their lights and sirens blaring.



Upon arrival, a recording of Bruce Springsteen, “Born in the USA,” began playing over the speaker system, which was everyone’s cue that Cook had finally arrived. Several Boy Scouts eagerly greeted Cook at the door and led him to the gymnasium where he was immediately honored with a salute by four former Marines, robed in their dress blues. The gym was full of Cook’s family and friends. Still shocked, Cook was then invited up on stage by his mother and father, Rodney and Gretchen Cook, founders of Mission American Gratitude.

Rodney and Gretchen Cook organized and created Mission American Gratitude for service members to be respectfully welcomed home after being honorably discharged from the military. They have been organizing homecoming events for service members for years, but this particular one was extra special because this time, it was their own son coming home.



Stationed at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Cook served two successful tours in Afghanistan with Baker Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. His family and friends were overjoyed to see him arrive home safely, and for good this time on top of it all.

“Getting the whole community together like this shows that people actually care about the veterans of this country,” said Cook. “It’s a good feeling.”

Once on stage, local vocalist Kelsey Cunningham sang the National Anthem played by the Marching 100.

One of the most personal touches to the event was a video that was played on a large screen. The video was a collaboration of messages from Marines Cook served with throughout his career. As soon as Cook saw one of his buddies from his unit back in 29 palms on the screen, he was immediately overwhelmed with emotion. Laughing, Cook watched each and every Marine come up on the screen, sending him best wishes in his new chapter in life, civilian-hood.





“It was awesome, I’m overwhelmed with happiness and excitement” said Cook. “I’m so glad I am home, but I feel bad about my boys still back there. I will definitely miss them.”

Toward the end of the ceremony, all veterans were asked to come up on stage and the crowd stood on their feet and clapped their hands in appreciation for the service the citizens on stage served their country. With the 40-plus veterans still on stage, Godfrey Mayor Michael J. McCormick announced that this week, Jan. 4-10, is officially Veteran’s Appreciation Week in the Village of Godfrey. This week is formally named Veteran’s Appreciation Week to show community support for our veterans’ acts of valor.

“The village pledges it’s loyalty to our veterans’ for their dedicated service to the community with a special thank you to one of its own, US Marine Cpl. Jordan Allen Cook, Infantry 0311 Baker Co. 2nd Platoon who has served two combat tours in Afghanistan,” the proclamation reads.

After the veterans took their seats, the Air Force JROTC Saber Team performed a ceremonial POW/MIA table skit in remembrance of the Prisoners of War and those Missing In Action.

As the ceremony commenced, The Smash Band played all-American music for the crowd to enjoy. People from the area stopped to pay tribute to Cpl. Cook and all that he has done for this country.

Though the ceremony was in honor of the return of Cpl. Cook, the mission of American Gratitude still stands strong; to provide open arms and support to those returning from the fleet of our militia.



If a local honorably discharged veteran is soon to return home to the Riverbend area, the Cook family asks that they be contacted to ensure a happy arrival.

“We will work our hardest to make their welcome home something to remember,” said Rodney.

For more information on Mission: American Gratitude, visit [www.missionamericangratitude.com](http://www.missionamericangratitude.com).

Riverbender.com welcomes story submissions on veterans returning from home. For future homecomings, please contact us at [brittany@riverbender.com](mailto:brittany@riverbender.com) or [danbrannan@riverbender.com](mailto:danbrannan@riverbender.com).

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