

## Shawn Mello Offers Some CAF Show-and-Tell

When Shawn Mello arrived at Mintz Elementary School in Brandon, Florida last month, he got the attention of the young students there in an instant. Maybe not quite like the trainees he used to supervise as an Army Special Ops Green Beret, but close.

Shawn is helping CAF-Florida spread a message of hope and inspiration around the Bay Area, last month speaking to Mintz students in a special program organized by fourth-grade teacher and mega-CAF supporter Stacey Underwood. He didn't bring notes or handouts – he just brought his extra leg for the kids to pass around.



Stacey is the wife of a soldier who has done his share of time in the Middle East, and is particularly passionate about supporting CAF's Operation Rebound program. When she heard Shawn might be available to speak to the school during the recent Great American Teach-In, she jumped on the chance.

"The students just absolutely loved him, and the teachers praised his honesty and straightforwardness and rapport with the kids" she said in an e-mail following the visit. She said she is working with Shawn to get in touch with a young amputee and former student there to pursue a possible CAF grant for a new prosthetic.

"I had a great time," Shawn said through a huge smile. "I just love kids, and it is so great to be able to share my story with them and help them understand."

Shawn is himself a father of five, and served in Special Ops around the world. Five years ago he was running a Military Dive School Training Program in Key West when a freak accident in rough weather threw him from his Zodiac, and he was struck by the propeller. After some painful attempts to save his leg, he finally had it amputated about eight inches below the knee. He's thankful for his knee, but struggles with nerve damage and phantom pain in his lower limb as he tries to maintain a very active lifestyle.

CAF helped Shawn purchase a triathlon bike and brought him to the recent San Diego Triathlon Challenge to participate in a special running clinic for amputees put on by renowned gait specialist Bob Gailey. His goal is to complete the Olympic-distance St. Anthony's Triathlon in April as co-captain of the CAF Team.

He enjoys talking to groups about dealing with physical disabilities, and has offered to share his story and the CAF mission with interested Bay Area groups. Certainly the kids at Mintz Elementary were locked on to every word.