

Your Well-Being Information Resource

Well-Being Liaison Office (WBLO)



FLO Notes



A Family Like No Other – Providing For A Relevant And Ready Army

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WBLO Chief's Corner

Honoring the sacrifices of our families

Military Spouse Day (May 6), Mothers Day (May 8) and Memorial Day (May 30) top the list of important events for our Soldiers' families. We recognize the sacrifices that our Army families make while supporting their Soldier.

Army spouses are a tremendous support system, one that dates back to the Revolutionary War. They frequently endure long periods of separation and leave familiar surroundings, only to find themselves establishing a new home in a distant place.

I am reminded of the rugged nature of America's pioneer men and women who crossed this land long before the comforts of a robust highway system and the transportation to match.

Our military spouses have that pioneering, rugged spirit. I am as in awe of their accomplishments in the early days of our Army as I am of their accomplishments today. Those who have not walked in the shoes of the Army spouse may not understand the sacrifices that accompany military living. But never have I met anyone so aware of their commitment, yet un-daunted by the measure of their sacrifice.

There are some Army spouses I would like to say a special thanks to, many of whom are no longer with us. In my mind's eye I am totally convinced they are still watching over us and keeping our Army family safe.

Mother's Day is surely a day to celebrate. Mothers all over this land will celebrate a day designed to enable us all to express our love and gratitude to a very key individual in our life ... Mom.

I marvel at how any of us made it

through our childhood, but at least for me there was always my Mother. There are many mothers I would like to say thanks to just one more time. So to you who read this, thank you for making your children strong, educated and thoughtful. Thanks for helping us find our compassionate side. And for that special mother out there, my Mom, thanks for allowing me to serve this great nation of ours. Somehow I think she will see this and understand.

The last Monday of the month, May 30, is Memorial Day. To me this is a family day. It is a day to honor these members of this great military family that gave their life in War for the cause of freedom and the safety of this Nation.

There is no way to adequately honor the sacrifice of those who died in the name of freedom except to live in such a way as to bring value to the heritage that they left behind.

May is a busy month and for good reason. In our fast-paced world I hope you take the time to do the little things that count. Thank our military spouses, remember Mom, and honor those who have passed before us. Take care this May and may your families be safe and sound.

Military Spouse Day '05

This year the Army will recognize the efforts of an exceptionally select group of people on May 6 as the Army, along with the Department of Defense and other branches of the service, celebrate Military Spouse Day.

The Army has adopted the theme "A Family Like No Other," which comes from the Army Campaign Plan, to mark this year's event.

Spouses have been an extremely integral part of the Army's warfighting team pretty much since the Army's inception nearly 230 years ago.

Army spouses serve at the core of the Army, providing family stability in a fast-paced and ever-changing environment. They

are the cornerstone of Army families.

The first Military Spouse Day was observed May 23, 1984, when a proclamation signed by President Ronald Reagan recognized the contributions of military spouses to the spirit and Well-Being of our Soldiers and the general welfare of the communities in which they live.

In 1985, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger established Military Spouse Day as the Friday before Mother's Day.

As volunteers, military spouses have provided invaluable service and leadership in educational, community, recreational, religious, social and cultural endeavors.

Army spouses have always made their own unique contributions to the Well-Being of the force through numerous wars and all the periods of restless peace in between.

The dedication and support of Army spouses is never more important than during times of war. The Army family remains strong and vibrant, and for that we owe a tremendous amount to Army spouses who rely on their own remarkable personal courage, indomitable strength and great resolve to sustain Army families.

Please take time on May 6 to pause and use the opportunity to formally recognize Army spouses in your community – for their service, their sacrifice and for unyielding devotion to our Soldiers and our Army.

Operation Purple summer camp registration began April 15

Registration for "Operation Purple" summer camps for children of deployed servicemembers began April 15 on the National Military Family Association's Web site – www.nmfa.org.

The 22 Operation Purple camps provide summer camp experiences for more than 2,000 children whose parents are deployed in the U.S. armed forces. The camps are funded through the Sears American Dream Campaign, a \$100-million commitment to



strengthen families, homes and communities, officials said. The funding by Sears, Roebuck and Co. allows children to attend the camps free of charge.

NMFA officials said Operation Purple is the only summer camp program that focuses on helping children deal with deployment-related issues, and is open to children of personnel from all branches of the U.S. armed forces.

Applications are available through May 15 on the NMFA Web site.

NMFA developed Operation Purple camps last year in response to the need for increased support services benefiting children of men and women serving in the armed forces, especially those whose parents are or will be deployed, officials said.

With funding from Sears, Roebuck in 2004, NMFA conducted 12 camps, reaching nearly 1,000 young people. This year, the program has expanded to host more than 2,000 children. NMFA officials estimate that more than 135,000 children are experiencing the absence of a parent due to a deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, and still others have a parent deployed elsewhere.

“Operation Purple Summer Camps fulfill a critical need in the military community,” said Candace Wheeler, NMFA’s chief executive officer. “We have been overwhelmed by the messages of support and gratitude we’ve received from children, parents, the Department of Defense, the National Guard Bureau and members of Congress. We are thrilled to be able to expand the program this year.”

A senior Sears official explained why the company is involved. “Sears prides itself on serving the needs of homes and families, and our affiliation with the NMFA provides advocacy programs for the families of men and women actively serving in our armed forces,” said Alan J. Lacy, vice chairman and chief executive officer of Sears Holdings Corp. “Our support of the summer camps enables a fabulous developmental experience for thousands of children and enriches the lives of their families.”

The camps, which last from five to seven days, give children ages 8 to 18 an exciting and memorable camp experience, providing tools to help them deal with the stress resulting from a parent’s deployment, NMFA officials said.

Program officials said interested children from military families are encouraged to apply for the camp located nearest their home.

More than 30 weeks of Operation Purple camps are offered in 18 states (Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas and Utah), three international locations (Germany, Italy and Japan) and in Guam. A list of camp dates, sites and other information is available on NMFA’s Web site.

The National Military Family Association, a nonprofit organization, focuses solely on the military family, and its stated goal is to influence the development and implementation of policies that will improve the lives of those family members. The association’s mission is to serve the families of the seven uniformed services through education, information and advocacy. For more than 35 years its staff and volunteers, made up mostly of military family members, have built a reputation for being the leading experts on military family issues, NMFA officials said.

Sears, Roebuck has a long tradition of support for the men and women of the armed forces and their families dating back to 1916. Today, for qualified Sears, Roebuck employees activated for duty through the National Guard or reserve, the company pays the difference between the Soldiers’ Sears, Roebuck salary and military pay and offers extended employment benefits for up to 60 months. Since 2003, Sears, Roebuck has provided NMFA with more than \$2 million to address the unique challenges faced by military families.

Operation Military Kids creates community support network for military youths

Operation: Military Kids, a community support network for school age children of deployed military servicemembers was officially launched during a ceremony in the Dirksen Senate Office Building, April 6.

The U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center, Boys and Girls Clubs of America, National 4-H, Military Child Education Coalition, National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, and other community groups came together to provide and coordinate support for geographically dispersed military families.

The partnership identifies national, state and local agencies, resources and community assets to deliver recreational, social and educational activities to youth who suddenly find themselves with deployed family members, but who don’t live on or

near a military installation.

“Being a military kid all of a sudden is plain and simple a tough situation for these young people to be in,” said Sen. Charles E. Grassley (R-Iowa) during his opening remarks at the national launch of the program.

Although the program is open to all military children regardless of service affiliation, it is specifically focused on those of deployed Army National Guard and Reserve members.

“The OMK program supports Army National Guard and Reserve youths like myself,” said Gary Ashcroft, son of a U.S. Army Reserve member from Georgia. “It has become more than just a program to many in our nation, it has in fact become a way of life – a means of existence.”

The program provides military children with a sense of structure and support that they may not have had before, he added.

It has also helped

to fill the gap left by the absence of a deployed parent and has unified a population of military youth around the nation.

The OMK initiative was established in January 2004 and currently consists of representatives and partners in 20 states experiencing high deployment rates: Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

“The children of National Guard or reserve Soldiers can really have their world turned upside down when a parent deploys,” said M.A. Lucas, director of Army Child and Youth Services at CFSC. “They face new stresses and responsibilities at home in helping the remaining parent, and because they aren’t living in a military community may not have peers who can relate to their new situation.”

Children of military service members and others interested in OMK can participate in three outreach activities geared to raise awareness for the program in their community:

- “Speak out for Military Kids” is a youth speakers’ bureau, formed by military and non-military youth who give presentations to schools and community groups to help educate and raise awareness about military life and deployment.
- Civilian youth in OMK states will have the opportunity to participate in community service projects to assemble and



distribute “Hero Packs” (knapsacks filled with a variety of items). The packs will be given to military children and youth as a thank you for the sacrifices they make while their parents are deployed.

- OMK states will receive Mobile Technology Labs to be used to connect geographically dispersed military children with their deployed parents. The labs come equipped with laptops, digital photo equipment, video cameras, scanners, DVD burners, plastic laminators and a variety of software.

OMK youth outreach services will be promoted through workshops, displays and presentations at a variety of national conferences in the upcoming months.

“The Global War on Terror and the activation of so many National Guard and reserve servicemembers have touched communities across our country,” Grassley said. “It is imperative that we, as Americans, show our support for military children and families by connecting with them in our communities. Supporting programs such as Operations Military Kids is an important way to do so.”

For more information, visit the Operation: Military Kids Web site – www.usda-army-ydp.org/omk/.

‘Books for Troops’ program

“Books for Troops” lets you select and purchase books for servicemembers serving overseas. You simply buy the books of your choice from the “Books for Troops” Web page – www.booksamillion.com/ncom/books?id=3127205032678&cat=troops. Booksamillion.com will address and send your books to Soldiers – you pay no shipping charges on books for the troops.

“Books for Troops” works to send the books to unit commanders overseas. The commanders then distribute the books to the individuals in their units. Please note that for security reasons the program is not allowed to publish the addresses of the units that receive the books.

If you have a family member serving overseas, you may send details including the unit number via e-mail to business@booksamillion.com. Program officials will attempt to add the unit to the list of recipients.

Editor’s note: Book sales through this program are not tax-deductible.

New handbook updates veterans benefits

A new edition of the popular handbook “Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents” by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) updates the rates for certain federal payments and outlines a variety of programs and benefits for American veterans.

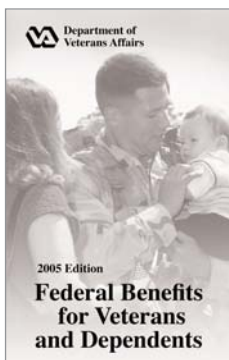
Most of the nation’s 25 million veterans qualify for some VA benefits, which range from health care to burial in a national cemetery. In addition to describing benefits provided by VA, the 2005 edition of the 120-page booklet provides an overview of programs and services for veterans provided by other federal agencies.

“Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents” includes resources to help veterans access their benefits, with a listing of toll-free phone numbers, Internet addresses and a directory of VA facilities throughout the country. The handbook can be downloaded free from VA’s Web site – www.va.gov/opa/feature/.

The handbook is one of the top selling consumer publications of the U.S. Government Printing Office. GPO accepts credit card orders for the publication by calling toll-free at 1-866-512-1800, handbook orders cost \$7 each when mailed to U.S. addresses, or \$67 for bulk orders of 25 copies. It can be ordered by mail from the GPO at Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250-7954 (stock #051-000-00228-8).

In addition to healthcare and burial benefits, veterans may be eligible for programs providing home loan guaranties, educational assistance, training and vocational rehabilitation, income assistance pensions, life insurance and compensation for service-connected illnesses or disabilities. In some cases, survivors of veterans may also be entitled to benefits.

The handbook describes programs for veterans with specific service experiences, such as prisoners of war or those concerned about environmental exposures in Vietnam or in the Gulf War, as well as special benefits for veterans with severe disabilities.



‘Families First’ to improve moving process

Full replacement value for lost or damaged items is among several changes taking effect in October as part of a new program called “Families First” that aims to improve the moving process for military families.

“We’re going to have a lot of happier campers, because they are not going to be losing any money out of their pockets like they did before,” said Cullen Hutchinson of the passenger and personal property office at the Military Surface Deployment and Distribution Command in Alexandria, Va.

According to the Hutchinson, under the current claims process, servicemembers only receive a depreciated value for property that is lost or damaged.

For example, a \$200 television that is lost or damaged might only be valued at \$100 after depreciation, he said.

With Families First, he said, “the carrier will either replace the television with a similar one or reimburse the servicemember the full cost of a new one.”

Another benefit of Families First is that servicemembers will now deal directly with the carrier to arrange direct delivery of household goods, thus alleviating the need for temporary storage, he said.

“What makes this even better for the servicemembers is that whenever you have temporary storage, the more handling of your household goods, the more susceptible it is for loss or damage,” he said. Hutchinson added that direct delivery will also save the services money now spent for temporary storage.

In Families First, servicemembers will file settlement claims directly with the carrier, using a Web-based claim filing process.

“There will not be a middle man; the servicemember will be able to address the carrier directly on the issue they have,” he explained. “And the carrier will have an incentive to take care of that servicemember in a positive way.”

Servicemembers will be encouraged to complete a Web-based customer satisfaction survey that measures the performance of carriers, Hutchinson said, and that survey will become part of that carrier’s record. “If the carrier’s performance is poor, then the amount of business he’s going to get from the government is going to fall off or stop completely,” he explained. “So there is an incentive there. It’s no longer a

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competition on cost, but it's a competition now with cost and performance."

He said the survey gives servicemembers a chance to influence decisions on whether a carrier continues to do business with the Defense Department.

"And that decision is going to be based on the performance of that carrier," he said.

The result, he said, will be "more quality carriers, which will translate into quality service for our servicemembers. And higher quality carriers will ultimately mean higher quality moves."

Hutchinson said efforts like Families First should help improve the quality of service in the military moving industry that transports the household goods of more than 500,000 servicemembers and their families each year.

He said problems in the moving industry have plagued the services for years, and that efforts to improve the moving process have been ongoing since 1994, starting with reengineering of the household goods process.

"The perceptions were that DoD was experiencing a very high loss and damage rate," he said. "When we looked at the numbers, it was significantly higher than some of the corporate accounts."

In addition, he said, claim rates also were higher for military moves. While average military claims ranged around \$500, he said many corporate claims were in the range of \$100.

In the end, he said, DoD expects to see a "considerable decrease in loss and damage claims."

"The reason for that is that the carrier is assuming a higher liability for claims," he said. "So it's in their best interest to protect the goods better so they are not subject to this loss."

Hutchinson said Families First also should ease some of the stress involved with moving.

"What we're trying to do is reduce that stress for our servicemembers so they can concentrate on more important things and not worry about 'my stuff'."

TRICARE changes for RC Soldiers

A new premium-based, healthcare plan is available to eligible National Guard and reserve Soldiers activated for contingency operations on, or after, Sept. 11, 2001.

According to Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., assistant secretary of defense for health affairs, "This benefit compares most favorably with any health plan option available to our Reserve Components. We hope that individuals will consider carefully the value of this benefit for themselves and

their families as well as the commitment to our nation's defense."

Updated information on the TRICARE Reserve Select program is available on the TRICARE Web site –

www.tricare.osd.mil/trs.cfm. Army National Guard and Reserve and family members may subscribe to TRS updates by e-mail, which will be sent as information becomes available. To subscribe, go to the TRICARE Web site – www.tricare.osd.mil/tricaresubscriptions.

Additionally, mobilized RC Soldiers will now be able to keep their healthcare benefit for up to eight years after returning from deployments.

Until now, Guard and reserve Soldiers could retain healthcare coverage under the TRICARE system for no more than six months after leaving active duty. Under the new arrangement they could retain coverage for at least one year and as long as eight years, depending on the length of their mobilization and the length of their commitment to remain in the Guard or reserve.

Starting this spring, reservists who served at least 90 days in support of a contingency operation since Sept. 11, 2001 and agree to serve in the Selected Reserve for at least one year can buy into TRICARE Standard, the fee-for-service plan.

The TRS program was created by Congress as part of the 2005 Defense Authorization Act, after the Pentagon failed to create an earlier version of the program on a temporary basis. The new program is permanent and is tied to service in support of a contingency operation and commitment to continue to serve in uniform.

Monthly premiums are required for TRS coverage and are adjusted January 1 each year. The monthly premiums for calendar year 2005 are \$75 for TRS member-only coverage and \$233 for TRS member and family coverage.

After the initial payment, the TRICARE regional contractor will send a bill by the 10th day of each month with payments due no later than the 30th day of each month. Premium payments are due in advance and will apply to coverage for the following month of coverage. The bill will specify how to change the method of payment to include automatic Visa or MasterCard payment and electronic funds transfer from a beneficiary-designated financial institution.

Changes have also been made to the TRICARE Dental Program. When a military sponsor dies while on active duty or active Guard and reserve orders for more than 30 days, surviving family members enrolled in the TDP will continue to receive TDP benefits for three years from the month following the sponsor's death.

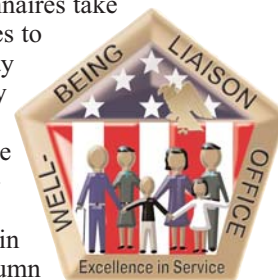
The TDP survivor benefit also applies to enrolled family members of Selected Reserve and Individual Ready Reserve (early mobilization only) sponsors who die while in Selected Reserve and Individual Ready Reserve status, regardless of whether the sponsor was on active-duty orders or enrolled in the TDP at the time of their death.

Under this survivor program, the government will pay 100 percent of the premium for three years from the month following the sponsor's death. The requirement to be enrolled in the TDP at the time of the sponsor's death is waived in certain limited circumstances where the surviving family was previously enrolled in the TDP, but disenrolled due to transfer to a duty station where dental care was provided to the member's eligible family members under a program other than the TDP.

Well-Being Liaison Office

The Well-Being Liaison Office has added two new "Customer Satisfaction Questionnaires" to help us evaluate two of the key services the WBLO provides – Army Families Online (www.armyfamilies.org) and the Army Information Line (1-800-833-6622).

Both Questionnaires take just a few minutes to complete and may be found at Army Families Online by clicking on the "Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire" button in the left-hand column of hotlink buttons.



Information gathered through these Questionnaires will be used to better enable WBLO staff to meet the needs of Army Families.

Army Families Online features news and information relevant to Army Life, as well as a robust "SmartBook" that provides our constituents with a means to help themselves in their search for information and problem resolution.

The Army Information Line is a toll-free telephone resource to provide accurate information, useful resources and helpful referral services to those with issues or concerns pertaining to Army Life. The line serves as a safety net for those who have exhausted all other resources.

WBLO staff members are available from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. EST, Monday through Friday to assist members of the Army's constituent communities - Soldiers (Active-Duty, National Guard and Army Reserve), Civilians, Retirees, Veterans and Families.