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THE NEXT GENERATION

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**INSPIRING STORIES FROM
ACROSS THE COUNTRY**

**ASSISTANT SECRETARY OWENS
ON HOUSING, CLIMATE
AND COLLABORATION**

NOVEMBER 2023



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BY TIM FORD, CEO, ADC

BUILDING OUR FUTURE

Ten years ago, we tried something new.

In 2013 we gathered leaders from communities, military and industry to find innovative solutions to the challenges facing installations. The first Installation Innovation Forum in 2013 attracted only 250 people, but it fostered important conversations, and it moved partnerships and collaboration between bases and communities to a new level.

This month we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Installation Innovation Forum with a crowd four times the size of the inaugural event. Together, we are looking ahead to the ideas, solutions and leaders that will guide us into the future.

Welcome to *America's Defense Communities*, ADC's annual magazine that explores the relationship between our bases and communities through stories, images and interviews from across the country. In the 2023 issue, we focus on the people, places and themes that are defining the next generation of defense communities, while also looking back at some memorable moments.

In **Perspectives**, we learn how electric vehicles are changing the infrastructure of our installations and how DOD's top leader in charge of bases is tackling big issues. In our **Communities** section, we share stories from around the country, including how our 2023 Great American Defense Communities are approaching tough challenges. In **People**, we sit down with the Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan—the first woman in uniform to lead a military branch—and meet other leaders who are shaping the future of defense community leadership.

Thank you to our supporters and contributors, including USAA, for making this project possible. Tell us what you think and share your story ideas for a future issue at info@defensecommunities.org. 

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Gen. CQ Brown joins his predecessor, Gen. Mark Milley, as Milley leaves the Pentagon for the last time on Sept. 28. Army photo by Bernardo Fuller



NOVEMBER 2023

WHAT'S INSIDE



Two Dominion Energy charging stations in Louisa County, Virginia. Photo courtesy of Dominion Energy

On the cover: Logan, the son of a Coast Guard chief petty officer, visits Coast Guard Station Atlantic City, New Jersey in April 2023 to celebrate the Month of the Military Child. Coast Guard photo by Chief Petty Officer Cynthia Oldham

FEATURES

14 Perspectives

Dominion Energy's Take on the Future of EVs

Q&A with the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy, Installations, and Environment

19 Communities

Checking in with Defense Communities Across the Country

37 People

Spotlight on Female Leaders

The Next Generation of Defense Community Leaders

Ivan Bolden's Legacy of Partnership

DEPARTMENTS

- 1 **Publisher's Note**
- 4 **About ADC**
- 8 **Snapshot**
- 12 **Overheard**
- 48 **The Last Word**

Heather Wilson, former Secretary of the Air Force, speaks with soldiers at the Great American Defense Communities reception in El Paso, Texas on June 14, 2023. Army photo by David Poe



Adm. Linda Fagan salutes during the National Anthem at a change of command ceremony at Coast Guard Base Alameda, California
Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 1st Class Brandon Giles

ABOUT ADC

ADC builds resilient communities that support America's military. We are the connection point for leaders from communities, states, the military and industry on community-military issues by enhancing knowledge, information sharing, and best practices. With nearly 300 communities, states, regions, and affiliated industry organizations, ADC represents every major defense community/state in the nation.

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Maggie

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LEGAL COUNSEL

George Schlossberg, Esq.

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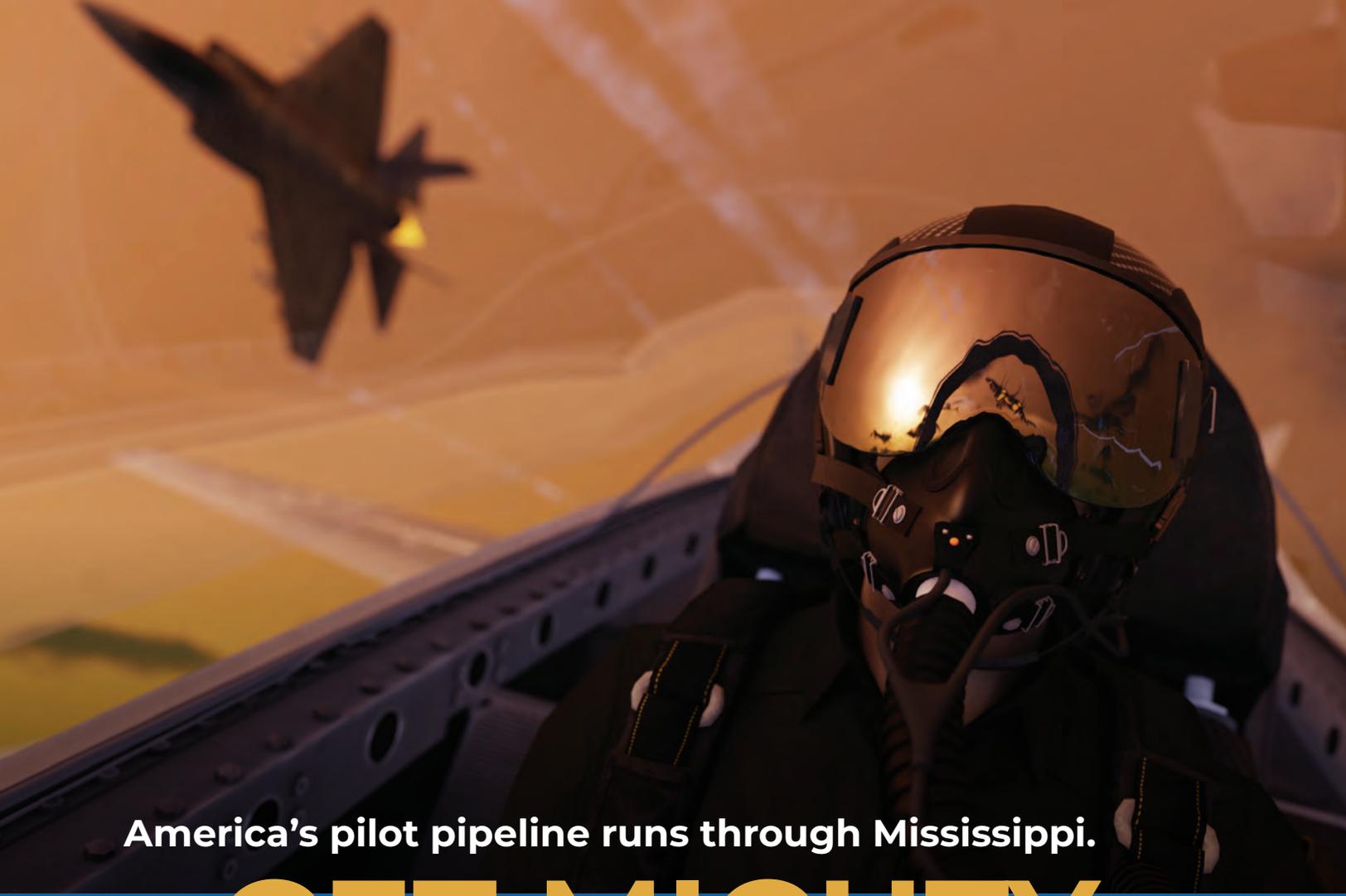
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PUBLISHER
TIM FORD

EDITOR IN CHIEF
GRACE MARVIN

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
RANDY FORD
ISABEL ZIMMERMAN

ART DIRECTION
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ASSOCIATION OF
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CONTRIBUTORS



RANDY FORD has worked with ADC since 2011. He is currently editor of the daily On Base newsletter and a cohost of America's Defense Communities

| The Podcast. He is also founder of First Story Strategies, where he helps nonprofits and trade associations with storytelling.



WILLONA M. SLOAN is a strategic storyteller who writes for businesses and nonprofit organizations. She facilitates a creative writing series with the

National Portrait Gallery, and she has hosted literary events and writing workshops in Iceland and Canada.



GRACE MARVIN is ADC's director of communications and has served as editor in chief for the 2019, 2021 and 2022 *America's Defense*

Communities magazines and a contributor in 2020. Passionate about sharing the stories of communities and people making a difference, she manages ADC's Great American Defense Communities program and the association's video storytelling.



ALLISON YANG is a communications and public relations intern at ADC. She is currently a senior at Seattle University studying journalism

and strategic communication. In addition to writing for *America's Defense Communities*, she manages the magazine's advertising program.



MARK PARROTT is a communications coordinator at ADC. He manages ADC's social media, podcast and media outreach and assists with marketing

initiatives, event promotion and the Great American Defense Communities program.



ISABEL ZIMMERMAN is a communications coordinator at ADC. She manages ADC's Defense Community Champions program and assists with the

association's outreach initiatives and event promotion.



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SNAPSHOTS

America's Defense Communities looks back at some of the moments that caught our eyes in 2023.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

The U.S. and Ukrainian flag fly side-by-side at the Joint Force Headquarters in Sacramento, California in Feb. 2022 to commemorate Ukraine's fight against invading Russian forces. Army National Guard photo by Sgt. 1st Class Amanda H. Johnson

Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman CQ Brown Jr. congratulates cadets during the class of 2023 graduation ceremony at Falcon Stadium in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Air Force photo by Justin R. Pacheco

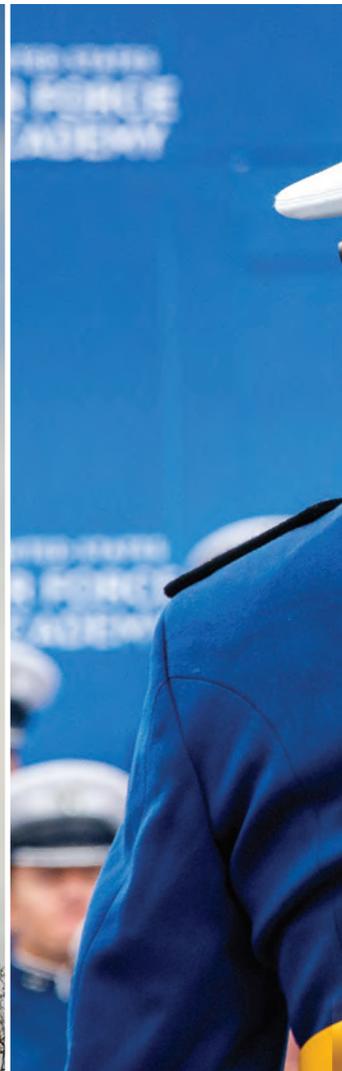
Marine Corps spouses operate a gross decontamination line at a Spouse Appreciation Day in Annex Stump Neck, Maryland. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Angel G. Ponce

Maj. Gen John P. Hronek, adjutant general for the state of Montana, and Maj. Gen. Matthew P. Beevers, adjutant general for the state of California, participate in a panel at the 2023 Defense Communities National Summit.

Representatives from ADC and USAA visit El Paso, Texas in June 2023 to celebrate the community's recognition as a Great American Defense Community. Photo courtesy of city of El Paso

Maj. Lyka Mason is welcomed to command during a change of command ceremony at Joint Base Pearl Harbor—Hickam, Hawaii in May 2023. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Alan Ricker

Chief Gas Turbine Systems Technician Michael Fox greets his daughter on the pier after returning from patrol. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Danielle Baker





Welcome
Dr. Jill Biden
and
Dr. Kathleen Hicks
to
Fort Drum



First Lady Jill Biden helps children with a Valentine's Day art project at the Fort Drum South Riva Ridge Child Development Center in New York on Jan. 30, 2023. Army photo by Mike Strasser

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OVERHEARD

IN OUR DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

America's Defense Communities looks back at quotes that perked our ears in 2023.

“

Our installations and the communities that host them comprise one community, recognizing those that live, learn, work and play in this community, regardless of any installation fence lines, share the same natural and man-made threats.

—PATRICK O'BRIEN, DIRECTOR,
DOD OFFICE OF LOCAL DEFENSE COMMUNITY COOPERATION

”

“

There is no room for prejudice, racism or extremism in the greatest land fighting force on earth.

—SECRETARY OF THE ARMY
CHRISTINE WORMUTH ON THE 75TH
ANNIVERSARY OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 9981,
WHICH INTEGRATED THE MILITARY

”

“

The Army may recruit soldiers, but we retain families. So, we have to create opportunities for our families as well.

—LT. GEN. KEVIN VEREEN,
DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF
FOR INSTALLATIONS, G-9

”

The communities that our military calls home are committed to a ‘One Community’ approach that strengthens the relationship across an installation’s fence line, to include neighbors, schools and small businesses outside the base as well as inside.

—KAREN HOLT, ADG PRESIDENT

There’s a difference when a community comes together collectively to take care of our service members, and it pays in dividends and returns.

—SGT. MAJ. DANIEL A. DAILEY (RET.)

It’s been 75 years since women were integrated into the service, and when we began, we were capped at about 2% of the force, and we were very limited in the types of jobs that we could have. Over that 75 years we have come a long way, our progress has been accelerating, but we’re not done.

—GENERAL JACQUELINE VAN OVOST,
14TH COMMANDER OF
U.S. TRANSPORTATION COMMAND

Military spouses are the heart and backbone of our military community, and their well-being is tied to the readiness of our armed forces. During mission, deployment, reintegration and reset, spouses are partners in military life.

—PATRICIA MONTES BARRON, DEPUTY
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR
MILITARY COMMUNITY AND FAMILY POLICY

CHARGING FORWARD

Dominion Energy has deployed 50 buses since 2021. Photo courtesy of Dominion Energy



ADC asked Dominion Energy about DOD's electric vehicle goals, charging infrastructure and innovative solutions that can help guide defense communities into a greener future.

ADC: Department of Defense has mandated that all military branches convert their fleets of non-combat vehicles from gas-powered to electric by 2035. What role can local or regional electric utilities play in meeting these ambitious goals?

DOMINION ENERGY: Local and regional utilities like Dominion Energy (DE) are positioned to lead the roll-out of EVs at installations because they've already done so for state and local governments and private sector across the country. Utilities have technical expertise as well as ongoing established partnerships with top manufacturers of EV charging stations and infrastructure. Utilities also have long-standing relationships with customers and extensive regulatory experience. Utilities are tracking data and outcomes for current customers, and these insights provide the detailed information needed to correctly assess need and demand. Utilities that participate in Utilities Privatization (UP) contracts have deep insight

and knowledge of the existing utility infrastructure on the installation and can apply that to the planning and execution of a system-wide EV launch. And most importantly, under privatization, because the utility is the owner/operator, they're responsible for the maintenance and safety of all EV systems.

ADC: There are lots of challenges and questions around whether our EV infrastructure is reliable enough and ready for large-scale implementation. What are some of the major challenges on the minds of energy industry leaders?

DOMINION ENERGY: As the UP provider on nine military installations, one of the major challenges is building a strategy that fits with the net zero goals of our government customers. Other challenges are:

- Rapid adoption of EVs and the upfront costs to upgrade the grid for additional capacity;
- Mapping out and planning for upgrades as needed;
- Investing in new technology and tools; and

- Educating fleet managers to encourage smart charging behavior.

In addition, we are assessing and building into our systems the ability to add carbon-free power and by 2035 hope to be able to add newer chargers that are bi-directional.

ADC: With climate-related disasters on the rise and global temperatures continuing to set records year after year, what is there to be optimistic about when it comes to expanding electric vehicle charging capacities?



DOMINION ENERGY: With Dominion Energy's commitment to net zero, we are optimistic that the adoption of EVs will help with climate challenges. DE's vision is to become the most sustainable energy company in the country. Innovation is a key component of our net zero strategy, and through new technology and new ideas, we can absorb any EV charging capacity issues. DE is on the cutting edge of implementing renewable and sustainable energy sources across our system for all customers, including installations. DE

is participating in hydrogen research hubs, building solar farms, and investing in microgrid integration and battery energy storage—which can supplement grid power or operate off the grid during extensive climate or homeland security incidences. DE is also proud of our electrical school bus program, which integrates vehicle-to-grid technology charging assets for our county and local government school buses. The school bus batteries can be used as grid assets and push energy out of the batteries and back onto the grid when needed. This

asset-building program can be applied to installation vehicle assets so that fleet buses and vans, and eventually larger equipment, can also be used to provide supplemental power when needed. These types of innovative solutions for clean energy diversity, along with grid modernization will combat the ever-growing electrical vehicle capacity challenge. When the movement of the fleet is dependent on reliable energy, building an efficient, resilient system is paramount to the success of the military's mission. 🇺🇸



OWENS DISCUSSES COMMUNITY VISITS AND WHAT'S LEFT ON HIS TO-DO LIST

Rear Adm. Jeffrey J. Kilian, commander of Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Pacific/Director, Fleet Civil Engineer, U.S. Pacific Fleet, briefs Owens and Paul Cramer, Owens' principal deputy, at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility, Hawaii Feb. 1, 2023. Navy photo by Marc Ayalin

Brendan Owens, assistant secretary of defense for energy, installations, and environment, has a broad portfolio. He oversees housing, resilience, defense infrastructure, PFAS cleanup and more. He talked with ADC on what he has learned about defense communities and the opportunities for closer partnership. Following is a portion of that conversation edited for length.

ADC: You first joined ADC at the Defense Communities National Summit in March, and it was just about a month into your new position. Several months later now, how do you feel about the progress you've been able to make?

OWENS: I've had the opportunity to get out and travel and be with people who are part of defense communities. Getting to engage in those conversations has really given me a much better understanding of what the relationship between the defense

community and the installation needs to look like, what success looks like, and in some instances, where we should be striving to do more. In terms of progress that we've made, I would have expected to do more than we have been able to do. But we have had some significant progress that I think we can talk about—our work around PFAS, around cleanup, around housing. We're at the beginning of what I'd like to say a year from now that we will have accomplished.

ADC: Every defense community is facing housing issues. Some of it's the condition of housing on base. Some of it is a shortage of housing off-base. Are there steps DOD and communities can take in the near term to make for healthier, more affordable places for service members and families to live?

OWENS: Every time we go to an installation, we do a housing tour. In addition to being the assistant secretary, I'm also the chief housing officer for DOD, so I have an obligation to really understand the conditions of the housing that we are asking our service members and their families to live in, whether it's accompanied or whether it's unaccompanied. We are accelerating our investment in housing. We are working with the military departments to make sure that we are resourcing the military housing projects well and better than they have been, making sure that we are making

investments in unaccompanied housing that bring it up to standard, because this is an obligation that DOD has to make sure that safe, affordable housing is out there for our families and for our service members.

One specific thing that I think would be better, and it might seem relatively mundane, is making sure that our service members, particularly when they're living in privatized housing, understand the Tenant Bill of Rights. We worked hard to get this put into place. It was a step in the right direction in terms of what we owe our service members and their families.

But we can't necessarily force education on people, so one of the things that I'd like to just sort of ring the bell on is making sure that people are out there going through the process of educating themselves about the resources that they have, whether that's the housing office on the installation, whether that's the dispute resolution process, whether it's knowing who to call and when to escalate things. There's a lot of really excellent information and training that's out there.

Making sure that you're not trying to learn the process when it's needed really does come in handy. We've seen that over and over again, when people understand the dispute resolution process well, they get good results. When they don't understand it, they tend to get lost in a complicated maze of challenges. And that doesn't work for anybody's best interest. Investing a little bit of time at the outset, level-setting to make sure that you have a good understanding of what your Tenant Bill of Rights, entitles you to is an investment that's going to make it easier on our end to deliver the quality of the housing and the service that we know service members and their families deserve.

ADC: We've had multiple extreme weather events this year. Andersen Air Force Base on Guam was hit really hard, but actually most installations themselves have largely been spared this year. That's not always going to be the case. What are the solutions, and how can communities support those?

OWENS: It is a partnership that's necessary because when you look at the fact that 70% of the people who work on military installations live in the community, it's not just about hardening inside the fence line. With that as kind of the backdrop, there

are strategies that will make communities more resilient, and some of those are DOD-funded. I think the Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot program is a great example of a place where DOD resources can be brought to bear to fix community installation, to start to fix resilience challenges in a community. I would encourage the folks who are in positions to try to put together packages to compete for that money in future years and engage actively and early to make sure that we are identifying the best resilience projects that we can identify.

Beyond that, I think that making sure that that people are following the preparedness steps that are out there to make sure that the communities themselves are capable of being as independent as they need to be and responding quickly in the event of an emergency. Lastly, I think—and this is something that I don't think defense communities really suffer from a lack of—is just pulling together when things get hard.

ADC: You spoke to ADC in May about PFAS cleanup and how that's a priority for DOD. You said then that it "requires direct engagement with communities." What does that engagement look like?

OWENS: We've had dozens of meetings with community advocates, with installations, with special interest groups that are focused on this, with subject matter experts who are working on the science and the technology for detection and disposal and treatment options. We've really taken this as a significant chunk of the portfolio and tried to make progress in a bunch of different ways. I've signed four department-wide PFAS policies over the course of the last five months that really are looking to change the way that we engage for the better. We're setting the military departments up to be actively engaged in response activities related to what we expect to be action around the maximum contaminant level for PFAS in drinking water. The EPA has put out proposed levels that are significantly lower, orders of magnitude lower, than the levels that we're currently operating on, so we're empowering the military departments to take the steps that are necessary to get ready for that, for those levels to come into play. That requires reassessment of all the data that we currently have, as well as going out and re-sampling where that's necessary.



Owens addresses ADC's Defense Communities National Summit in Washington, D.C. in March 2023. ADC photo by Will Noonan

We've been able to speed up testing requirements on groundwater by changing a little bit about what we would look at in terms of the testing requirements. We have put in place more transparency and guidance around what people should expect of the disclosure of the data that we ascertain when we do the testing in communities. We've also put in place a policy that was seeking to speed up the implementation of interim removal activities under [the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act].

We are not close to even being started on this in the time that I have left with this position, but we are hoping that what we've put in place so far creates momentum in a direction that we are not talking about the ones and twos, but we're talking about dozens and dozens and dozens of projects that are going forward. We're going to continue to do community meetings, we're going to continue to engage with our [restoration advisory boards], and we're going to continue to move as quickly as we can. 📺

You can hear our full discussion on a recent episode of America's Defense Communities | The Podcast.



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Community members pose for a photo at a community event in August 2023 at Port Hueneme, California. Navy photo by Master-at-Arms 1st Class John Cason



HAPPENING ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Every year, ADC's editorial team puts out a call to our members to share stories of what's been going on in their communities. The stories we get back are always surprising, inspiring and innovative. This year, we heard about new Defense Community (DCIP) projects, diversity and inclusion initiatives that are making a difference, and even a writer's group that's forging deep and healing connections amongst veterans.



A rendering of the Great Park of Irvine highlights the planned botanical garden. Image courtesy of SWA Group

NEW YOUTH CENTER IN THE WORKS

★ LAKEHURST, NEW JERSEY

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, is constructing a new youth center at Joint Base McGuire–Dix–Lakehurst, New Jersey. The center will be a one-story, 16,260 square foot facility that will provide 168 children between the ages of 5 and 12 with after-school programs, youth activities and youth support. The youth center will also have four activity rooms designed for different uses, including homework and computer work, arts and science, life skills, and dramatic play.

WORLD WAR II MILITARY BASE GETS A NEW LIFE

★ IRVINE, CALIFORNIA

Construction has begun on the Great Park of Irvine, a massive municipal park in California that's been in the works for over 20 years. The park, which is expected to surpass Central Park by more than 500 acres, is being built on the former World War II Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, which closed in 1999.

"The groundbreaking of the next phase of development at the Great Park is just the beginning," Great Park Chairman Mike Carroll said. "The next phase not only brings 300 acres of incredible amenities and services for Irvine, Orange County, California and beyond, it takes the city of Irvine to the next level. I am ecstatic to lead this unique and innovative charge, and I believe that the Great Park will be one of the best metropolitan parks in the world."

With an estimated cost of \$1 billion, the Great Park will span 1,300 acres and will likely take another 10 years to complete. It will feature numerous attractions, including museums, an amphitheater, a veterans memorial garden, an aquatics center, a sports complex and two lakes.

Construction is underway on a new youth center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey. Army photo by Hector Mosley



A WOOF-WORTHY UPGRADE

★ WICHITA, KANSAS

“We talk about mental health of people in the military all the time, but it’s huge in the dogs as well and you can tell,” said Tech. Sgt. Noah Hyatt, kennel master for the 22nd Security Forces Squadron. “When dogs are in a better kennel environment, they don’t have these issues.”

The Kansas City District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), is planning, designing and constructing a new kennel facility for the military working dogs of the 22nd Security Forces Squadron at McConnell Air Force Base in Wichita, Kansas.

Built several decades ago, the current kennels required much-needed updates. The design of the new facility considers factors like sun and wind exposure to ensure the dogs’ comfort. The USACE is also actively involving the handlers from the 22nd Security Forces Squadron in the design process, ensuring that the new facility meets their needs as well.

The project, estimated to cost \$5.3 million, is expected to be completed in 2026.

Kato, 22nd Security Forces Squadron MWD, and his handler enter a building during detection training. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Zachary Willis



BioHub Maryland Executive Director Michelle Ferrone (left) and Manager of Workforce Development and Partnerships Alexandra Haarich pose at a display for the facility. Photo courtesy of BioHub Maryland

LIFE SCIENCES INDUSTRY SEEKS VETS IN THE MID-ATLANTIC

★ FREDERICK, MARYLAND

In January, BioHub Maryland, an initiative to accelerate the state’s life sciences industry for companies and career-seekers, launched a skills training academy for military veterans pursuing careers in the life sciences industry in Frederick, Maryland. In collaboration with Platoon 22, a nonprofit organization committed to ending veteran suicide through effective reintegration, BioHub Maryland aims to connect with military veterans in Maryland who are eager to acquire fresh skills, opening doors to fulfilling careers in the life sciences sector.

“Maryland’s life sciences companies value mission-driven problem solvers who understand logistics, teamwork and other skills learned in the military,” said Michelle Ferrone, chief operating officer of Maryland Tech Council. “Our partnership with Platoon 22 will enable more veterans to upskill or reskill into the life sciences industry, where they’ll find a new mission fighting medical conditions such as cancer, muscular dystrophy, diabetes and rare diseases.”

The program’s training services encompass BioHub Maryland’s comprehensive online skills academy, which imparts essential knowledge in various areas of the industry.

FUNDING FOR THE PŌHAKULOA TRAINING AREA FIRE DEPARTMENT

★ HILO, HAWAII

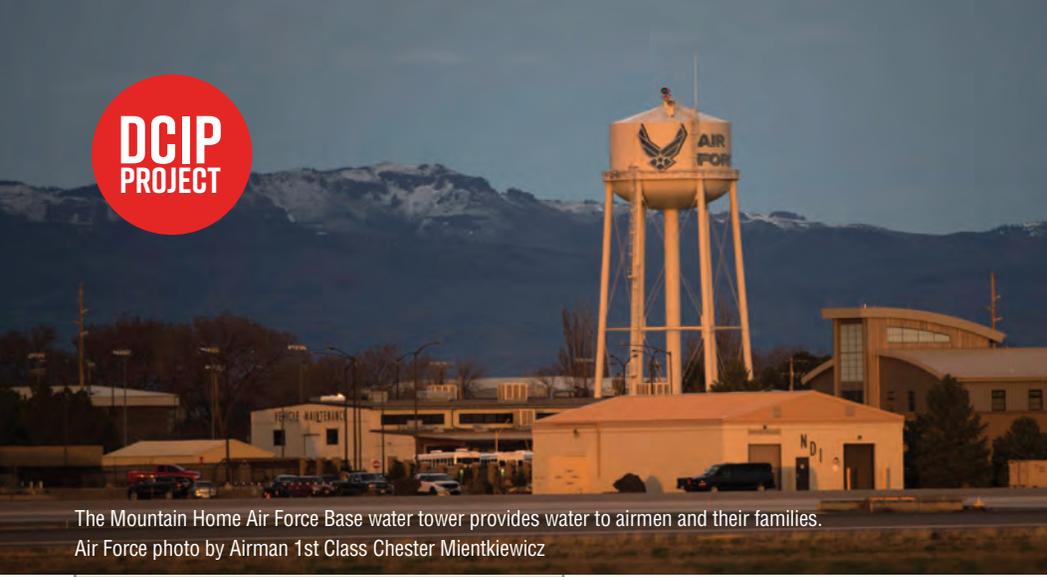
The island of Hawai’i will be better protected with a new firefighting and conservation warehouse located at Pōhakuloa Training Area (PTA). Funded by a DCIP grant awarded to the state of Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR), the warehouse will improve wildfire response and provide maintenance for firefighting vehicles.

In 2021, the island experienced its largest wildfire, and the following year, some of the same areas were devastated again. Since August’s wildfires on Maui, emergency preparedness and response have never been more important. The warehouse will be crucial to protecting military personnel and families, their homes and the installation, as well as minimizing impacts to training and base operations.

“The community is so important to us here at PTA, and this grant is just another manifestation of that,” said Lt. Col. Kevin Cronin, PTA commander. “PTA greatly appreciates the support it receives from the community and the robust relationships we have with DLNR. We’re always looking to grow and enhance those relationships.”

Members of the Pōhakuloa Training Area Fire Department extinguish a fire during training. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Mariah-Alexsandra Manandic-Kapu





The Mountain Home Air Force Base water tower provides water to airmen and their families. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Chester Mientkiewicz



The Fort Leonard Wood community gathers in an auditorium to celebrate high school seniors joining the military after graduation. Army photo by Angi Betran

NEW WATER WELL

★ MOUNTAIN HOME, IDAHO

Mountain Home, Idaho will soon have a new water well to support the construction of housing for airmen and their families at Mountain Home Air Force Base. Located on a high desert plateau, the city of Mountain Home and the base rely on groundwater from several wells to meet demands for drinking water, irrigation and firefighting. However, the current lack of wells means that Mountain Home struggles to adequately support water needs on base. As a result, 550 military families currently reside in Boise, a 45-minute one-way commute, where there is a more sufficient water supply.

In 2022, Mountain Home received a \$4.5 million DCIP grant in addition to a \$2 million grant from the American Rescue Plan Act to fund the construction of the city's 17th water well. The well will support the development of housing and infrastructure for the growing military community near the installation.

"The city of Mountain Home is always proactively thinking about how to sustain growth without financially impacting the current citizen population," said Mountain Home Mayor Rich Sykes. "Grants and other additional funding resources are how we do that."

INSPIRING FUTURE STEM LEADERS IN CALIFORNIA

★ MARYSVILLE, CALIFORNIA

Project Quesada is on a mission to inspire students from underrepresented communities to pursue STEM and pilot careers in the Air Force. The Air Combat Command (ACC) initiative is named after Lt. Gen. Elwood R. Quesada and held its first event this year in Marysville, California.

"In terms of resources, the people are what enable us to accomplish the mission," ACC Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer Andrea Contratto said at a fall 2022 conference. "We should be deliberately inclusive for all our communities."

Beale Air Force Base airmen from various career fields visited students at a local junior high school earlier this year for the initiative's first event. Students received a hands-on demonstration of the U-2 Dragon Lady space suit, participated in a Q&A with airmen and tasted the tubed food used by U-2 pilots.

The initiative is still growing, with goals to host events at Beale Air Force Base and create more interactive presentations. By connecting with students at these events, Project Quesada aims to demonstrate the support the Air Force can provide for every student who dreams of becoming an airman or pilot.



COMMUNITY SALUTE FOR FUTURE SERVICE MEMBERS

★ FORT LEONARD WOOD, MISSOURI

High school seniors from south central Missouri choosing to serve in the military after graduation were celebrated in May during an annual event, Community Salute to Service. The event recognizes students who are joining a branch of the military, National Guard or the Reserves, attending a college ROTC program, or accepting an appointment to a military academy.

A total of 54 high school seniors were recognized individually at the event by the branch of the military they are joining. Gen. Gary Brito, commanding general of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Virginia, served as the keynote speaker.

"Thank you for choosing to serve. I want to put emphasis on the word 'choose.' The United States is a nation that is dependent on young people like you—volunteers. This year marks the 50th anniversary of an all-volunteer force. You represent that volunteer spirit," Brito said.

The Community Salute to Service event has created a strong bond between Fort Leonard Wood and the surrounding community.

"In order to have a good unit and good service, and good Army in this case, you must have a good relationship with the community. You do indeed represent that," Brito said. "The connection is strong, and it is represented here tonight." 🇺🇸

Project Quesada held its first event at Anna McKenney Intermediate School in February. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Juliana Londono



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- ♦ A premier Army Training Center of Excellence, FLW trains approximately 75,000 active duty service members, 15,000 reserve component and tenant unit service members, and over 400 international students annually.
- ♦ The 4-county FLW Region's quality of life attributes are highlighted by high performing K-12 public schools, including \$142 million in public school renovations and new construction; access to quality healthcare & a new 250,000 sq. ft. hospital complex that will open in 2025; public airport with daily commercial jet service located on FLW; safe, affordable, quality housing; and an overall low cost of living.



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Endeavors President and COO Chip Fulghum and soldiers celebrate the opening of the SSVF office in Killeen, Texas. Photo courtesy of Endeavors



A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO HELPING VETS IN SUN CITY

Since 2017, the city of El Paso has partnered with a Texas-based nonprofit to ensure that comprehensive, effective and innovative wellness services are accessible to those who serve our country.

BY ALLISON YANG

When Lorenzo Barreras retired from the Navy, he remembers it was a time of uncertainty. “I didn’t know what to do next.”

Barreras wasn’t alone in his experience. Many service members experience challenges adjusting to life outside of the military. In Barreras’ hometown of El Paso, which is home to Fort Bliss and a large veteran population, resources and programs for veterans were plentiful, but accessing them wasn’t always easy. Paul Albright, chief military officer for the city of El Paso, knew his community could do more for those at risk of falling through the cracks.

“When we spoke to [our elected officials] about what we thought we needed to help the veteran and military community, we found we didn’t have data to support what we felt we needed,” Albright said.

To hear directly from veterans about their greatest concerns, the city of El Paso and partners launched the El Paso Veterans Needs Assessment in 2020. With nearly 2,000 respondents, the assessment found the highest needs for local veterans were claims assistance, employment assistance, mental health services, legal assistance, peer support and financial assistance. The city used these findings to adjust their strategic plan.

One of the partners in the city’s efforts was Endeavors, a nonprofit dedicated to providing relief to vulnerable people in crisis. Endeavors’ services are shaped by the six principles of the Endeavors Wellness Model: mind-body, knowledge, environmental, connectedness, economic and spiritual.



El Paso Mayor Oscar Leeser speaks to guests at the Great American Defense Communities reception, which was the topic of the June 2023 episode of the *Sun City Bliss* TV show. Army photo by David Poe

In 2017, Endeavors opened the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic in El Paso. The clinic provides free to low-cost counseling and mental health services to active duty service members, veterans and their families both in-person and virtually.

“There was a stigma a few years back causing you to suffer in silence if you were struggling,” Albright said. “You tried to work through things quietly or you didn’t work through them at all.”

Since the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic opened, Benjamin Miranda Jr., deputy senior director of operational business development at Endeavors, has seen the community become increasingly open to discussing mental health. “We want to ensure veterans and families are talking about mental health as if they’re talking about going to see a health care provider for shoulder pain. It should be a normal conversation for everyone and part of our day-to-day dialogue,” Miranda said.

Following the El Paso Veterans Needs Assessment, Endeavors brought Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families (SSVF) to El Paso. Funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs, SSVF assists veterans and their families at risk of or experiencing homelessness by offering homeless prevention and rapid rehousing services.

“It’s simple to give a veteran the keys to their new apartment and say, ‘congratulations and goodbye,’ but that’s not

going to be very successful,” Miranda said. “We have to ensure we’re incorporating extensive case management with veterans and connect them to additional services in the community for them to remain housed and be successful. Even after they exit our program, our case managers stay connected and ensure veterans know they can always reach out, because our goal is to ensure they don’t end up unhoused again.”

Lorenzo Barreras is one of the many veterans helped by SSVF. After the passing of his wife, Barreras struggled financially

and became unhoused. He lived in his vehicle and stayed with family members before contacting the VA for assistance. The VA connected Barreras with Endeavors, and he was assigned a case manager who got to know his needs and found him a new home.

This was only the beginning of Endeavors’ support. After finding Barreras a home, Barreras’ case manager made sure he had groceries, hygiene products and furniture. To prepare for long-term success, Barreras received financial wellness training, and he recently began seeing a therapist at the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic.

“Endeavors will call me once a month and check up on me to see how I’m doing,” Barreras said. “Whatever I need, they’re able to help me.”

Today, Barreras is worlds away from the uncertainty he experienced when he was transitioning out of the military. The security of a reliable housing situation brings peace of mind, and he enjoys writing poetry and reading in his free time.

“I was thinking a lot of negative stuff when I was out on the street, but when I found a home, I knew there was help out there,” Barreras said. “I’m very appreciative of Endeavors. I have learned so many things from them.” 🙏

El Paso, Texas is home to one of 24 Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics across the country. Photo courtesy of Endeavors





RESEARCH FOCUSES ON WELL-BEING IN FAIRBANKS

BY WILLONA SLOAN

Extreme winter temperatures, the unforgiving arctic terrain and stretches of endless daylight or deep darkness can all be daunting for members of the military and their families when settling into a posting at one of the military installations in Fairbanks, Alaska. The U.S. Army has prioritized new efforts to prepare the military community for life in the region, build resiliency and prevent personal crisis.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) included \$3 million to support research addressing suicide among rural and remote military installations in the federal government's fiscal year 2022 appropriations. "The rate of suicides among America's military community is both heartbreaking and gut-wrenching. One suicide alone is too many," Sen. Murkowski said in an April 2022 press release.

"I've heard firsthand from so many servicemen and women in Alaska about the challenges they face—from physical and psychological trauma, isolation, to seasonal depression," she said. "We need to do everything in our power to turn this tide and be there for our service members—to get them the proper help they need so suicide is never the answer."

In fall 2022, University of Alaska Fairbanks researchers were selected to develop a program focusing on reducing suicide rates for Alaska-based Army soldiers. In particular, the research is being conducted in collaboration with the Army's 11th Airborne Division, which is housed at Fort Wainwright and Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

The research is being led by the University of Alaska Fairbanks Center for Alaska Native Health Research (CANHR), in collaboration with the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command.

The project builds off work CANHR has done with Alaska Native youth, particularly in the Yukon-Kuskokwim region, over the past two decades, with the goal of reducing rates of youth suicide. Using a community-based participatory



Army paratroopers with the 11th Airborne Division “Arctic Angels” perform a live-fire exercise at the infantry squad battle course at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska in February 2023. Air Force photo by Alejandro Peña

Liz Mangini and Maria Stejskal from the Center for Alaska Native Health Research share their research. Photo courtesy of CANHR



of our soldiers—leaders connected with the soldiers and soldiers connected with each other,” Major General Brian S. Eifler, commanding general, 11th Airborne Division, deputy commander of United States Alaskan Command, explained in a 2022 press call. “Leaders [will] contact 100% of our soldiers’ spouses or next of kin; 100% of our soldiers will get a wellness check from behavioral health or the military family life counselors.”

The combined efforts build resilience for all. Still in its first year, the early developments of the project have been encouraging, and indicators have been pointing in a positive direction. Morton points to the stories of strength, courage, hope and tenacity he has heard.

“We’re grateful to the community, and we’re grateful to our Alaska Native communities for the knowledge they’re sharing with us, and to the military leadership who are saying, let’s tackle this a different way,” Morton said. “We want to use this as a stepping stone to better understand how to effectively reinforce and protect our service members and their families. It also is so vital to have that bidirectional relationship with the community that empowers everybody around the table.” CANHR’s research collaboration will continue through 2025. 

research model, CANHR collaborated with community elders. “The elders talked among themselves, and they said, ‘We think that we need to go back to our subsistence roots.’ They went back to their traditions,” said James R. Morton Jr., research assistant professor and counselor educator with CANHR. Dr. Morton serves as the principal investigator for the research collaboration with the Army.

Youth learned technical skills such as how to run a trap line and repair equipment, and deepened connections to traditional, cultural practices and knowledge. Participating youth reported feelings of greater connection, meaningfulness and belonging, Morton said.

The CANHR research team, including the center’s director, Stacy Rasmus, is leveraging this research by translating it

into a military context and focusing on military culture. One way in which this research is innovative is its emphasis on “protective factors.” While traditional suicide prevention practices identify risk factors or provide intervention for a person already in crisis, CANHR’s research is identifying the protective factors that could increase well-being, mental health and social connectedness, and improve collective understanding of the mission and purpose. An early recommendation has been to emphasize purpose-driven leadership, using research by U.S. Army Medical Research Directorate West.

CANHR’s project also connects with the 11th Airborne Division’s Mission 100, which increases access to behavioral and mental health resources. “Mission 100 is a campaign to connect with 100%



HEALING AND HOPE THROUGH WRITING IN OMAHA

BY WILLONA SLOAN

The Nebraska Warrior Writers program provides a space for community and creativity. Open to members of the military, veterans and adult family members, the program brings people together to write, learn and share.

Omaha-area veterans participate in a Nebraska Warrior Writers event. Photo courtesy of Jen Stastny

First launched in 2014 in Lincoln, the Nebraska Warrior Writers program is a collaboration between the Nebraska Writing Project, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Humanities Nebraska. The Omaha site launched in 2015. Workshops consist of six to eight biweekly sessions and are open to writers at all levels of experience. Each session includes a lesson in technical craft, guided writing prompts and time for getting feedback on previously written pieces. Another exciting aspect of the workshop is its list of guest speakers, which have included poets, authors, University of Nebraska at Omaha professors and performers, such as Charlie Youngblood, Gina Tranisi, Zedeka Poindexter and Seema Reza. The workshop culminates in a voluntary public reading.

“Writing can help our brains in myriad ways,” said Jen Stastny, co-facilitator of the Omaha chapter. “There are a lot of studies that talk about writing as a way to heal from trauma. We don’t, however, require that [participants] write about their trauma. It’s

much more about them having fellowship with people who understand them. They love getting together and talking to each other and helping each other.”

“A lot of our writers don’t write about their military service at all,” Stastny said. “I would say that maybe throughout the years that I’ve been doing it, only about 50% have ever written about their military experience. Some of them write about it intensely, as well. They’re all there for different reasons.”

Sharon Robino-West, who served in the Marines, began writing in earnest as a way to express her experiences of caregiving for her son, who also served as a Marine. “I wanted to write about what our family had been through and what my son had been through with Iraq. I ended up writing an eight-page short story that was published,” Robino-West said. She has stayed for the strong sense of community. “Because we are all veterans, some active duty and some family members, there’s a lot of camaraderie. For those of us that



ODE TO 2020

BY SHARON ROBINO-WEST

It's the little things
That carry me through
They always do.
I learned once upon a time in Parris Island
On graduation morning
Blue jeans
Drive-through hamburgers
The scent of seawater drifting in the wind
Faith and family,
These were not little things
Instead
They are important things.

It's the sheer scale of things
The overwhelming weight of heaviness
Somber and suffocating
The angst in not saying goodbye
And not saying hello
At the moments when life ends
and begins again.

I miss people
Miss parks
Miss haircuts
And the freedom to come and go
It's the depth of joy in these small moments
That carries me through
And they will carry me through this
Too.

It's the breadth and the magnitude
Of our overwhelming gratitude
To nurses and doctors,
Sanitation workers,
Teenagers at the grocery
Behind the Plexiglas
Volunteers making face masks
When there aren't any to be found
In this spring of sadness and
Dis-ease.

From *Warriors to Warrior Writers: Journeys to Healing* features contributions of fiction, poetry and nonfiction from workshop participants. The anthology is edited by Sara Hollcroft.

participate, we love to write, we love to read. We've been able to bring each other together as a community."

"I think that once you've been in the military, a lot of people don't realize, but we do, that it will stay with you whether you've been in combat or not," she continued. "You meet somebody else who is a veteran and it's like a family member. You can instantly start to bond over your experiences. We get that as well as good instruction and encouragement on our writing."

Bill Smutko learned of the group after taking a writing class at the Nebraska Writers Guild Convention in 2019. "We were sharing our work. When I finished reading my story, the instructor asked if I was a veteran then told me about the Warrior Writers." He joined the group soon after and has attended almost every class since spring 2019.

He most enjoys being with other writers, learning from the guest speakers and receiving feedback on his

work. Smutko contributed several short stories to the Nebraska Warrior Writers anthology, which was published in 2020, and he has developed a collection of short stories about the Vietnam War that are currently under consideration by a literary agent. An important lesson he has taken away from the group is: "Keep writing. Even on days you don't feel like it."

"Writing about my experiences in Vietnam helped me finally shed my PTSD," Smutko said. "Veterans have stories to tell about their experiences that the rest of the world needs to hear. Not every city has the resources and number of veterans to have a program...[but] it is definitely an idea worth spreading."

Nebraska Center for the Book recognized Nebraska Warrior Writers with the 2019 Jane Geske Award, in celebration of its contributions to writing. The award is supported by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. 📖



SUPPORTING MILITARY SPOUSES IN THE MONTGOMERY-RIVER REGION



Alabama Governor Kay Ivey signs Alabama House Bill 388 into law on May 3, 2018 at Maxwell Air Force Base. Air Force Photo by Airman Matthew Markivee



Two military family nonprofits work together to make sure Montgomery-River Region military spouses are not only employed but also empowered. **BY ALLISON YANG**

Everybody knows that military members make countless sacrifices for our country, but the sacrifices of military spouses, at times, can be overlooked. Spouses often face significant employment challenges and are forced to give up their careers due to frequent relocations. Two organizations, aided by recent legislation, are working to change that in the Montgomery-River Region.

With a growing number of working military spouses, the ability to seamlessly transfer licenses and credentials to other states has become a necessity. “If the license process takes six months and you’re only going to be there 12 months, there’s no point in doing it,” said Jennifer Holliday,

military family liaison of the Alabama Military Stability Foundation (AMSF). “To continue a family’s standard quality of life, it’s important that they can get those jobs as quickly as possible.”

The Alabama state legislature passed the Military Family Jobs Opportunity Act in 2018. The law requires most occupational licensure boards to provide temporary or permanent licenses and waive initial licensing fees for military spouses transferring into the state.

Military spouse advocates then took it a step further. Alabama Lt. Gov Will Ainsworth (R) proposed a website to centralize information about licensure portability. This proposal became the

Spouses ask questions and voice concerns during a panel discussion led by the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command’s Command Sgt. Maj. Daniel Hendrex. Army photo by Kelly Morris

Heroes Welcome website, a one-stop shop for military families new to Alabama. AMSF runs the website, and Holliday contacts each Alabama licensure board every six months to ensure that the most current information is listed on the website.

“We need to make sure that if spouses click on something on our site, they are going to get the correct information and are able to move forward in a timely manner,” Holliday said.

In addition to simplifying the license transfer process, the Military Spouse Advocacy Network (MSAN) is working to reduce employers’ hesitancy to hire military spouses by educating employers about military spouses’ high capabilities.



“We can see things outside of the box, we’re so resilient, and we’re always about making things better. That’s why we have so many military spouses doing amazing work, at least those who were given the opportunity,” said Verenice Castillo, founder and CEO of MSAN.

In 2021, AMSF partnered with MSAN to launch the Alabama Mentorship-HUB, a virtual community that provides peer-to-peer mentorship and an education and resource center for military spouses new to the state. “After MSAN created a global mentorship hub, we decided we needed to look into those states and communities that needed more support,” Castillo said.

The education and resource center offers videos, guides and toolkits on a multitude of topics, including employment, careers and networking. For more personalized support, military spouses can connect with a seasoned military spouse mentor via an online live chat.

“We have official collaborations with Hiring Our Heroes, the Department of Defense and the Military Spouse Employment Partnership. We connect military spouses to these resources from the moment we know where they are located or where they are going next,” Castillo said. These resources provide information about networking, resume building, job fairs and employment opportunities in the mentee’s local community. In the future, MSAN plans to establish more localized mentorship hubs in military communities that have limited support.

For the last three years, MSAN has offered the Military Spouse Leadership Development Program (MSLDP), a four-month training program that helps 50 military spouses develop leadership, service, advocacy and mentorship skills. The free, global and virtual program equips military spouses for success in

their communities and careers and also earns them a certificate from the National Preparedness Leadership Initiative at Harvard University.

The inspiration for MSLDP came from Castillo’s experience as a military spouse. “At the beginning, I didn’t know how to communicate with leaders within the community around me,” Castillo said. “I was feeling intimidated and experiencing imposter syndrome, which a lot of the time prevented me from doing the things I wanted to do.”

Castillo hopes that employers will become more willing to hire military spouses and fully recognize their value. “Not only is an employer going to hire a spouse with wonderful skills for that specific employment, but they’re also bringing in a strong leader who is doing so much in the community and is willing to bring that to the employer,” Castillo said. 🇺🇸



1st Lt. Elizabeth Mueser points to her “Fly Like a Girl” morale patch on the flight line at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida on March 30, 2023. Air Force photo by 2nd Lt. Kristin Nielsen

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PEOPLE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Who will be the next generation of defense community leaders? What's it like for female leaders working in male-dominated industries? Ten years from now, what will military-community partnerships look like? In these next few pages, ADC explores these questions and more.



Randy Norwood (third from right) celebrates the Greater Omaha region's distinction as a Great American Defense Community at the College World Series in June 2023. Photo courtesy of College World Series of Omaha, Inc.



“TAKE EVERY OPPORTUNITY”

ADC President Karen Holt and Angela Ritz of the Army’s CASA program share stories from their 20+ year careers as civilians working alongside military leaders and what they’ve learned along the way. **BY GRACE MARVIN**

When Karen Holt entered the ballroom at her first ADC conference in 2006, she quickly clocked that there weren’t a lot of women in the room. In fact, she remembers being one of six. She describes the gender disparity at early ADC conferences as “not hard to notice.”

“Today, I’m really pleased with the diversity I see now in terms of age and gender and ethnicity. It’s reflective of our defense communities,” said Holt, who was elected president of ADC in March 2023.

Holt is from a defense community. She grew up two miles from Aberdeen Proving

Ground (APG) in Aberdeen, Maryland. But growing up, she wasn’t familiar with the phrase “defense community”—even though those two words would come to define much of her professional career.

“My dad worked [at APG]. My grandparents had worked there. It’s always been the biggest employer here in Harford County,” Holt said. “On the Fourth of July every house had a flag. Everybody was in red, white and blue.”

Holt’s first job out of college was in public relations for the Army Research Laboratory. Three months into her role, there was an installation-wide reduction in force.

“Last one hired, first one let go,” Holt recalled with a laugh. “So, I got a job with a defense contractor working in the mailroom. I was kind of devastated. But everything leads you on a journey, and as a result of that mailroom experience, I left knowing where every military installation in the country was.”

After over a decade of working in economic development and public relations (including 13 years as a public information officer for Cecil County Public Schools), Holt accepted a position as BRAC manager for the Chesapeake Science and Security Corridor, led by Harford County’s Office of Economic Development. “It was a very new process to my world. But I loved the level of collaboration and partnership that was necessary to help these communities not just survive but thrive.” Holt is now director of Harford County economic development.



Holt interviews Army Secretary Christine Wormuth at the 2023 Defense Communities National Summit. ADC photo by Will Noonan

Angela Ritz, director of Civilian Aides to the Secretary of the Army (CASA) program for the Army, has a similar story. Ritz grew up in a small town in Missouri and never thought she'd work for the federal government, let alone the Department of Defense. She moved to the D.C. area after college with dreams of joining the foreign service. Instead, she landed an internship at DOD and quickly fell in love with what she describes as "the international flair" of government and the unmatched opportunities it brought.

She started out at the Defense Information Systems Agency then applied to be a speechwriter for the Army. From there, she moved into special events and project management.

"I often got picked up for new positions and temporary assignments. I took every detail I could," Ritz said. "I loved working across the organization so I could



Civilian Aides to the Army and the CASA program office visit the Army Recruiting Headquarters at Fort Knox, Kentucky. From left: Deborah Gantt, CASA Program Office; Ken Wong, CASA for Eastern Pennsylvania; Jennie Taylor, CASA for Utah; Lance Izumi, CASA for Sacramento, California; Allie Braswell, CASA for Northeast Florida; Walt Quinn, USAREC staff; and Angela Ritz, CASA Program Director. Photo Courtesy of Angela Ritz

get to know everybody. My advice: Take every opportunity."

In her current role, Ritz oversees the CASA program, an Army initiative that's been around for 100 years. CASAs are hand-picked "influencers" tasked with serving as ambassadors for the Army in their communities. When asked about the type of people selected to be CASAs, Ritz said it's most important for CASAs to have a knack for genuine connection and be able to tell the Army's story.

"Twenty, 30 years ago we had so many veterans in communities telling kids about their time in the service," Ritz said. "Your teachers might have been veterans. Grandparents. We rarely have that these days, so we rely on these community influencers to fill that gap."

Ritz said being a civilian without a military background has not held her back throughout her DOD career, but she admits that there's been times when maybe she's had to work a little harder. She's taken advantage of numerous leadership training courses and obtained a coaching certificate.

"The difference between civilian and military is in the military [leadership development] is required. They tell you

when you'll learn it and what leadership training you will get. As civilians you have to self-select," Ritz said. "I could truly be in leadership education every day if I wanted to be. The Army gives amazing opportunities to civilians. I think a lot of people just don't take them."

When asked about coming up as a female civilian in a male-dominated industry, Holt, like Ritz, said she didn't feel held back, and she wants more women to consider careers in defense.

"This year I was able to interview Christine Wormuth, the 25th secretary of the Army. That was a real milestone for me, personally and professionally," Holt said. "It's critical to see that kind of engagement and immersion that women now can have, in what has historically been a male-dominated sector."

With the 50th anniversary of ADC coming in 2025, Holt finds herself reflecting on how the organization has grown since she first joined.

"I don't hesitate in knowing the diversity that will be represented at that celebration," she said. "And that speaks volumes for ADC." 📌

THE CALL TO SERVE

ADM Linda L. Fagan, 27th commandant of the United States Coast Guard, opens up to ADC about over 40 years in service.

ADC: Tell us about your decision to join the Coast Guard. Did you ever imagine you'd lead the branch?

FAGAN: I grew up in the Boston area in Acton, Massachusetts. My parents bought a boat when we moved there, and every weekend we were on that boat. You can't be on the water in New England and not notice the Coast Guard. I was a sophomore in high school when I went into the guidance counselor's office and there was a Coast Guard Academy pamphlet there. I never looked back.

My goal at that time was simply to serve in the Coast Guard as an officer. When I was admitted to the Coast Guard Academy in 1981, I could not look up and see women serving in senior leadership roles. Today women are serving at every level in the organization, and the Coast Guard Academy is nearly 40% women. When I



Adm. Fagan meets with members from Sector Honolulu in September 2022. Coast Guard photo by Joseph Gerczak



Adm. Fagan watches from the Coast Guard Cutter Eagle during a keel-laying ceremony in New London, Connecticut. Coast Guard photo by Petty Officer 3rd Class Matthew Thieme

seat at the table. Be prepared and use your voice. You are there for a reason.

ADC: We know some service members choose to transition out of the military because it's hard to find a good work-life balance. What can you tell us about your efforts to address that issue in the Coast Guard?

FAGAN: Our people are the heartbeat of our service, and we are developing and implementing new strategies to sustain the Coast Guard as an employer of choice with a culture free from assault, harassment, bullying, hazing, retaliation, retribution and hate.

We recently expanded parental leave for all service members and are building flexible work options and policies to meet the needs of the modern workforce. We are aligning the talents, desires and experiences of every individual with the needs of the service to maximize the performance of both.

The way we hire, train, assign and promote our people has not changed significantly since the 1960s. We must adapt to remain an employer of choice. We recently announced a Talent Management Transformation Task Force, a new team that will build the agile and integrated human resources structure we need to manage our workforce more creatively.

ADC: Your Coast Guard duty assignments have taken you around the world, including all seven continents. Of all your assignments, which stand out as especially memorable?

FAGAN: My first assignment was onboard Coast Guard Cutter Polar Star icebreaking near both the North and South Poles. This shaped me as a leader and provided incredible opportunities to get qualified for some of our service's most exciting jobs. As a captain, I had the opportunity to work for Adm. Thad Allen, the 24th commandant of the Coast Guard. This position really opened my eyes to senior leadership and the Flag Corps in the Coast Guard. 🇺🇸



look at the Coast Guard through the eyes of my daughter, there's nothing she can't achieve in this organization.

ADC: What motivates you to continue serving?

FAGAN: It's the people that really motivate me to get up and put my uniform on every day. This incredible team of dedicated leaders and professionals that we have in the organization, whether it's the recruit that graduates Cape May all the way up to the commandant, is just remarkable. It's part of what's made it so enjoyable for the last 40 years.

ADC: What advice do you have for other women who dream of achieving leadership positions in the armed forces?

FAGAN: You are capable of anything. When opportunities present themselves, don't be afraid to step into them. Take the hard jobs. You are far stronger than you realize. Find a

PEOPLE



THE NEXT GENERATION OF DEFENSE COMMUNITY LEADERS

BY ISABEL ZIMMERMAN



- Hierarchy of needs
- Myths / preconceived notions
- Unknown
- Discrimination (service member and spouse)
- Work / Life Balance
- Choice



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Lopez joins Tampa Bay Chamber members Dave and Diane Crowthers, volunteers at the Blue Star Families “Nourish the Service” event in March 2023. Over 400 military families at MacDill Air Force Base received bags of snacks, hygiene products and household products. Photo courtesy of Tampa Bay Chamber

Lopez and Tampa Bay Chamber Military Advisory Committee Chair pose with a Florida Guardsman during the ESGR Bosslift at Camp Blanding. Photo courtesy of Tampa Bay Chamber

Norwood speaks about hiring veterans and building a military-friendly work environment at the 2023 Omaha H.I.R.E. Conference. Photo courtesy of the Greater Omaha Chamber

Williamson has a conversation with former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta at the California Association of Public Information Officials conference. Photo courtesy of CAPIO

Williamson delivers the opening welcome at the California Association of Public Information Officials (CAPIO) conference, held in Monterey in May 2023. Photo courtesy of CAPIO

What is a defense community leader? They are committed to service, they bridge the gap between installation and community, they build relationships, they are changemakers. ADC sat down with leaders from California, Florida and Nebraska to talk about what leadership means to them and their approaches to military-community partnership.

TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA

“A defense community leader is someone who is committed to making their community a destination of choice, not only for the Department of Defense and mission growth, but also for quality of life,” said Katie Lopez, vice president of member engagement at the Tampa Bay Chamber of Commerce in Florida.

Since starting at the chamber in 2018, Lopez has been focused on doing just that. She expanded the chamber’s career development series, Operation Partnership, to include opportunities for transitioning service members and spouses, recruited the Hiring Our Heroes Corporate Fellowship Program to open a location in Tampa, and led efforts to designate Tampa as a Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone.

As a military spouse herself, Lopez has a deep understanding of the difficulties military families and spouses face when moving to a new location. “My passion for serving military spouses and military families in general really stems from my own experience,” she said. “I have made that commitment to be that voice for military families, and I will do everything I can to help pave the way for them in whatever position I’m in.”

Lopez’s latest project is inspired by her own experiences. She’s developing a program for military spouses that is expected to launch next year. “We want military spouses to know that they have a sense of purpose here in Tampa Bay,” Lopez said. “[The program] is rooted in the idea that military spouses need to be rooted in their communities and to help them build that sense of belonging.”

OMAHA, NEBRASKA

Nearly 1,500 miles from Tampa, Randy Norwood, AVP of military affairs and strategic partnership at the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce in Nebraska, described his passion for community outreach.

“I have always had a sense of service,” Norwood said. A 24-year veteran of the Air Force, Norwood described his time in the military as his way of giving back. Today, Norwood continues his service by advocating for service members and their families.

After starting at the chamber in January of this year, Norwood has prioritized workforce development efforts. “We’re in the process of curriculum development to allow transitioning service members to... get employed easier. That is a big push for us right now,” Norwood said.

Another concern for Norwood is educating future leaders. To get more young people involved in military-community partnerships, Norwood said, “We need to think today about who’s going to be

filling our shoes tomorrow. There is such a need, and so many opportunities, to grow our replacements and make them better than us.”

Norwood views himself as a connector and is always searching for new ways to further community-installation partnerships. “How can I connect? How can I integrate the active duty population and their family members into the local economy to get them involved?” Norwood said.

MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

On California’s central coast, Mayor Tyler Williamson continues Monterey’s long-established focus of finding innovative ways to strengthen and enhance the city’s relationship with local installations.

Mayor Williamson grew up in a military family, never living in one place for more than four years. He describes this experience as “absolutely essential” to his work. “[Being a military child] allows us to be very adaptive and flexible. I use those skills as mayor to appreciate people who come from different backgrounds and experiences.”

Monterey is home to two installations, the Naval Support Activity Monterey, serving the Naval Postgraduate School, Fleet Numerical Meteorology and Oceanography Center, and Naval Research Laboratory Monterey; and the U.S. Army Garrison Presidio of Monterey, serving the Defense Language Institute’s Foreign Language Center. Alongside serving as mayor, Williamson also works at the Naval Postgraduate School, where he has been for over 12 years.

“Having that partnership with our military installations is just so vital, it’s so deeply embedded within our communities. The ‘Monterey Model,’ an innovative partnership between the Presidio of Monterey and the city, paved the way for hundreds of Intergovernmental Service Agreements (IGSAs),” Williamson said. “Because of this long history [of military-community partnerships], there’s a lot of pride that our community takes in not only having a lot of veterans here, but their families as well.”

In addition to the “Monterey Model,” city government engages regularly with the Navy and Army on emergency exercises, community planning and other collaborative efforts.

Like many defense community leaders, Williamson is faced with a housing shortage. “To support military and civilian personnel staying in our region, it’s critically important that we are providing more housing,” Williamson said. “The military plays a key role in helping have a conversation with the community around how we create and construct more housing within the region. We want to make sure that they feel included and accepted and that they’re part of the community.”

Williamson has a lifelong connection to public service, and to the military. On or off base, he noted there’s space for everyone to get involved. “Democracy is so important and so foundational to our country,” Williamson said. “Our military and civilian personnel, our military agencies, it’s the whole reason why they exist, to defend our democracy and to defend our way of living. We all can play a role in that.”

Bolden, seen here with his late mother in an undated photo, served in the Army for 27 years. Photo provided



COMMUNITIES' PARTNER IN CHIEF PLANS POST-ARMY LIFE

Ivan Bolden, the Army's chief of partnerships and a pioneer in how to form and implement intergovernmental service agreements, plans to retire at the end of 2023. ADC talked with him about his service and the future of partnerships.

ADC: You've announced your retirement from the Army after almost 50 years in uniform and as a civilian. Can you reflect back on your journey?

BOLDEN: I started at Southern University. I was an ROTC grad and spent 27 wonderful years in the military and served at various places in the U.S. and overseas. When I retired from the active military, I was working for the assistant secretary of the Army, and he said, "We're going to keep you here and then we're going to find a position." Eventually that morphed into being over the privatization division

and then moving on to community partnerships. I have had a wonderful experience. I am looking forward to retiring from the government, but I'm going to still pay it forward.

ADC: Assistant Army Secretary Rachel Jacobson recently said that “Ivan Bolden” and “partnerships” are synonymous. Many here at ADC feel the same. How do you feel about where you've guided the Army partnership program?

BOLDEN: I'm hugely honored that Assistant Secretary Jacobson would say that about me. But I feel that I am just doing my job. I have had the help of many great leaders that has allowed me to be creative and an independent thinker in this program. For that, I'm eternally grateful. Retired leaders like LTG Dave Halverson, LTG Gwen Bingham and LTG Jason Evans have been stalwarts in support of the partnership program. LTG [Kevin] Vereen [Deputy Chief of Staff, G-9], and SGM [Michael] Perry [Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Deputy Chief of Staff, G-9] have taken it to another level with their use of social media and community engagements.

My ultimate champion has been Carla Coulson. She has been the rock behind the success of the program. For these leaders and staff like Donna Wilhoit, Dave Leinberger, Erin Berhalter, Andrea Sojda and Claire Reynolds, that has what made this program special. This is truly a program where it takes a village to make it work. Hats off to the IMCOM team of Rich Morris, Anson Blackall and James Huys as well.

ADC: Ten years from now, what do you think the partnerships will look like across DOD?

BOLDEN: I hope that partnerships will be in a position where the term limit is up to 20 years instead of 10. This will allow communities more time to put together large-scale projects without having to raise taxes with their citizenry. For example, if a community has to purchase large-scale equipment for a project with us, it is more economical for them to



Bolden and Rachel Jacobson, assistant Army secretary for installations, energy, and environment, pose for a photo at the Pentagon Hall of Heroes in February 2023. Army photo by Erin Bearhalter

amortize it over a 20-year period versus a 10-year period.

I'm looking at the next generation of partnerships. We've been around for 10 years, and it's time to expand and test the limits of the intergovernmental authorities. I'm looking forward to doing something with climate resiliency and water resiliency. I'm looking forward to doing stuff with 5G. I'm looking forward to using more universities to do partnerships, using some of the historically Black colleges and universities to tap into their talent pool and partnering with the military services. I'm trying to set the stage for my service counterparts and others to follow.

ADC: What motivates you in the work you do?

BOLDEN: We just signed an agreement with West Liberty and Clay County to provide weekend and drill week child care via a company called WeeCare. This is the first of its kind, and I predict it will be a game changer in providing child care. Three years ago, I received a call from an officer who needed help to find a place for a software development factory. In six

weeks, through the outstanding support of Molly Beth Malcom, executive vice chancellor at Austin Community College [in Texas], we signed the agreement. It's partnerships like those that keep me motivated. Because when someone says you can't do it, then I always try and work towards a “yes.” I am blessed and humbled to have the trust of senior leadership and I never take that for granted.

There's a saying in Luke that says, “To whom much is given, much is required.” I follow that, and I just want to do as much as I can to help others. I grew up in the military. My father was in the military. And I just feel that I'm in the position to where I can help others.

When I was a second lieutenant, I used to get policies from the Pentagon, and I would look at them and say, “Well, if they only knew. If they only knew.” Now I'm old enough and in the position to where I am the “they,” so I always reflect back to Second Lieutenant Bolden whenever we're putting a policy out, and we try to make the best decision that will benefit soldiers and their families. 🇺🇸

Bruno, U.S. Marine Corps recruit and mascot in training, boosts morale during an obstacle course event at Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California on March 2, 2023. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Alex Devereux





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OUR NEXT GENERATION



BY KAREN HOLT
PRESIDENT, ADC

Twenty years ago, communities across the country were bracing for the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC) process. Months out from the release of “the list,” communities tried to understand the process, how decisions would be made and what they could do to prepare. This is when many of us were introduced to the concept of defense communities, and when a newly renamed Association of Defense Communities became a leader in helping navigate the long journey ahead.

BRAC 2005 was historic in its scope and impact. It not only closed bases but also marked a shift in missions across the country. Its cascading impact led to a new engagement by community support organizations and the development of groundbreaking partnerships and opportunities. A new model of the modern defense communities was born.

That evolution continues, and a decade later the next generation is emerging. We are a generation of defense communities and leaders powered by the idea of being “one community” and embracing interdependence with the military. We’re driven by an understanding that the missions we support will change both in what they do and where they do it and that our ability to adapt is essential. We understand that our role as defense communities will only get more complex and finding innovative solutions to new challenges must be our mission. We know we can’t do our job alone, and the investment and commitment at every level of the military must remain strong.

No longer driven by BRAC, we have a unique opportunity to define our future. This is a driving force behind our plans for ADC’s 50th anniversary in 2026. Our planning process, ADC 50 & Forward is underway, and I look forward to sharing more about it with you in the months ahead.

Planning is great, but the real work of building the next generation of communities will happen through leadership. I’m encouraged to see that the next generation is already emerging—and expanding in who is included as leaders. It’s vital we find new partners at the local level, including our current work to engage military spouse leaders from across the country.

I’m confident in the future of ADC because of the communities and leaders I see today. Our next generation will be strong, vibrant and impactful. They continue the mission and impact that has been part of ADC for nearly 50 years. 🌐

A C-130 Hercules from the Nomads of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron 62 arrives at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Fla. VR-62 is the first C-130 squadron to be based at Naval Air Station Jacksonville home since the base was established Oct. 15, 1940. The move was part of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure commission’s decision to close Naval Air Station Brunswick, Maine. Navy Photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Elisha Dawkins





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