



NEWS YOU CAN USE

Weekly News for National Guard Families

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National Guard Family Program Online Communities for families and youth:

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<http://www.guardfamilyyouth.org/>

TRICARE website for information on health benefits

<http://www.tricare.osd.mil/>

Civilian Employment Information (CEI) Program Registration for Army and Air National Guard, Air Force, and Coast Guard Reserve

<https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/appj/esgr/index.jsp> (Note to those viewing this page in Word or PDF format: You may have to copy this address and paste it into your browser's address window.)

Cumulative roster of all National Guard and Reserve who are currently on active duty

<http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Mar2004/d20040331ngr1.pdf>

Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) contains links and information about schooling, distance education, scholarships, and organizations devoted to the military family

<http://www.militarychild.org/index.cfm>

Militarystudent.org is a website that helps military children with transition and deployment issues. It has some great features for kids, parents, special needs families, school educators, and more—even safe chat rooms for kids.

<http://www.militarystudent.org>

Disabled Soldiers Initiative (DS3)

This website provides information on the new DS3 program. Through DS3, the Army provides its most severely disabled Soldiers and their families with a system of advocacy and follow-up.

<http://www.armyds3.org>

Have an article, announcement, or website that you'd like to share with the National Guard Family Program Community? Send your suggestions in an e-mail to Michelle.Bohlen@ngb.af.mil.

Michigan National Guard Soldiers Train In New Mexico

Michigan Army and Air National Guard

2500 South Washington Avenue

Lansing, Michigan 48913

(517) 483-5600

PRESS RELEASE: March 10, 2005

Lansing—The 51st Civil Support Team, a full-time Michigan **National Guard** unit trained and equipped to support local emergency responders during a weapons of mass destruction event, participated in a training exercise that included live radioactive sources.

Prior to the exercise, a training course was provided by Los Alamos Radiation Consultants and included radiation physics, an understanding of working with ionizing radiation and understanding the effects of radiation. This training is part of the CST's ongoing effort to maintain the skills needed to provide support to the Michigan communities in the event of a terrorist attack.

CST members must complete more than 400 hours of specialized chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive response and management training to be fully qualified. In addition, members receive 200 to 400 hours of specialized refresher training each year.

The mission of the 51st is to provide support to civil authorities at a potential or actual domestic chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or explosive incident. The 51st is the Michigan **National Guard**'s only full-time unit and is not subject to an overseas deployment.

Today, a little more than 2,300 Michigan **National Guard** Soldiers and Airmen are deployed across the globe; however as the Michigan Guard serves the nation, the 51st 9,000 other members remain, in reserve, ready to respond to state emergencies including homeland defense events.

New Program Offers Subsidized Child Care to Guard, Reserve

American Forces Press Service

March 4, 2005

By Samantha L. Quigley

WASHINGTON - The Defense Department has joined forces with national agencies to help Guard and Reserve families in finding and affording child care while Mom or Dad is deployed in support of the global war on terrorism.

Child care, as you know, is one of the top (concerns) voiced by families as well as by commands on what's needed, said Jan Witte, director of the Pentagon's Office of Children and Youth. Her office monitors the new program, dubbed Operation Military Child Care.

DoD, in partnership with the National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, which administers the program, designed this initiative to benefit those who do not live near military installations, Witte said.

We have a contract with NACCRRA to assist us in finding spaces outside the military community for those Guard and Reserve (members) who are deployed and active duty (people) who are not near a military installation, Witte said. _We also hope to assist in reducing the out-of-pocket expense to the servicemember._

When a parent is deployed, she said, the remaining parent may discover that child care is something the couple hadn't had to think of before. And need is not the only consideration. The extra expense can be shocking.

While OMCC doesn't fully subsidize child care, it does work to reduce the financial burden, Witte said. The fees are based on a sliding scale that takes into consideration total family income and the care provider's actual cost, among other things.

To take part in the program, a family member would apply through NACCRRA via a special Web site or by a toll-free call to (800) 424-2246. The child-care provider also must apply -- an important step because of how the subsidy, which comes through the Children and Youth office, is paid out, Witte noted.

The subsidy goes to the program, not to the individual, she said.

The program officially kicked off March 3, but has been operational as a pilot program since late November 2004, Witte said. About 40 families are through the application process.

We feel like this is one area to provide assistance for the total force, she said. _We had not been doing much prior to this time for the Guard and Reserve as far as child care and school-age programs have gone._ She said the new program could get about 5,000 Guard and Reserve servicemembers' children into child care.

But that number could fluctuate if there is a change in the funding, she pointed out, which comes in the form of supplemental funding through Congress. Congress has funded the program for \$7 million, Witte said, though officials hope to expand the program in the future to try and accommodate some of the 38,000 children of active duty servicemembers in need of child care.

NACCRRA also supports the Guard and Reserve through a program called Operation Child Care. OCC is a voluntary NACCRRA program that provides up to six hours of free child care to Guard and Reserve families whose deployed servicemember is returning home for rest and recuperation.

“(NACCRRA) felt it was service back to the nation to thank the servicemembers for their sacrifices,” Witte said.

Witte said NACCRRA is a very well-respected alliance of all the child-care resource and referral agencies in the nation.

IRS Gives Tax Break To Members Of Armed Forces

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SunSentinel

March 8, 2005

Kathy Kristof, Personal Finance Columnist

More than 500,000 men and women in the U.S. armed forces will get some extra benefits this tax season, thanks to laws passed in the wake of military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

A key change, approved by Congress last year, gives members of the military the option to include or exclude all the pay they receive while serving in a combat zone when computing credits based on taxable income -- whichever will save them the most money. Most combat zone pay is exempt from federal income tax. But until recently, that exemption could have ended up disqualifying service members from claiming the earned-income tax credit -- a break of as much as \$4,300 in taxes for individuals and families earning less than \$35,458 annually.

That's because to qualify for the credit, individuals or households must have taxable income. For example, a soldier who spent all year in a combat zone -- and had no taxable income -- would not be eligible. For a soldier who has two children and makes \$30,000 a year, the loss of that credit would cost \$944.

On the other hand, a soldier who earned half of his or her \$30,000 in a war zone would definitely want to exclude that pay, because that would make the soldier eligible for the full earned-income credit of \$4,300. (The credit is staggered based on income. Those earning about \$15,000 annually get the biggest credit, whereas those earning less or more get less. That's because the credit was initially aimed at returning Social Security taxes to low-income filers.)

"You have to study the effect before you decide what to do," said Mark Luscombe,

principal tax analyst with CCH Inc., a Riverwoods, Ill.-based tax information and research service. "There's a range where additional income can help you and a range where it can hurt you."

The pay provision affects 565,809 active and reserve service members who served in hostile areas in 2004, Defense Department spokeswoman Ellen Krenke said.

Spending any amount of time -- even a day -- in a combat zone, a "qualified hazardous-duty area" or a "direct support area" qualifies the individual to exclude that full month's worth of pay, Krenke added. In other words, someone who arrived in a combat zone Jan. 31 and left Feb. 1 could exclude two months of pay.

The Internal Revenue Service maintains a list of combat zones and hazardous-duty areas on its Web site: www.irs.gov.

Other tax breaks for the military:

Those serving in combat zones, deployed in "contingency operations" or hospitalized outside the United States as a result of injuries sustained while deployed don't have to file tax returns until 180 days after they return home. No interest or penalties will be assessed on those who owe tax. They simply should write "combat zone" at the top of the return when they do file. However, those who are due refunds may want to file sooner, because no interest is paid on the refund.

There's a total tax exemption for those who die as the result of wounds, disease or injuries incurred in a combat zone. All the service member's income -- not just military pay -- is exempt from tax going back to the first year of service in a combat zone. If a service member was stationed in Iraq in 2003 but died in 2004, his or her family could claim a tax refund for any taxes paid in both years, Luscombe said. In 2004, 738 service members died in Iraq and Afghanistan, Krenke said.

The value of benefits afforded military families, such as paid child care and dependent-care assistance, is excluded from income.

Members of the Reserve and **National Guard** can take a deduction for service-related travel expenses when they need to travel overnight more than 100 miles from home. The deduction, which can be taken even by those who don't itemize, is limited to the federal per diem rate, which varies by locality.

Free tax filing help is offered on most military bases, Krenke said.

Pentagon Picking Up Tab For Deployed Guard, Reserve Child Care

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nbc4.com

March 9, 2005

WASHINGTON -- The Pentagon presides over the largest employer-supported child-care operation in the nation, and it's growing.

More than 200,000 children are in subsidized day care on military bases across the country. Now subsidies are being extended to members of the **National Guard** and the Reserves who are deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan.

A Washington-based organization called the National Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies is administering the program. Director Linda Smith said subsidies are made on a sliding scale tied to income.

Smith noted that when a member of the Guard or the Reserves is called up, the family's income can take a big hit.

Families who want to find out more can call (800) 424-2246 or visit the website www.childcareaware.org.

GUARD IN IRAQ

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Visit To Qatar Gives Area Soldiers A Chance To Rest, Reflect

The Associated Press

March 10, 2005

By Sandra L. Lee, Lewiston Tribune

LEWISTON, Idaho It's the rainy season in Iraq, and in the northeastern steppe country where Kirkuk is located the grass is green and flowers are blooming.

"It's kind of pretty in a way," said Sgt. David Woodall of Moscow.

"Beautiful rolling hills, reminds me a lot of the Palouse ... green and warm," said Spc. Justin Schultz of Lewiston.

One day last week the wind blew away the smoke from the oil fires and they could see the snow-covered mountains that divide Iraq's eastern border from Iran.

"It kind of reminds me of home," said Woodall, who works for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Speaking of smoke, said Schultz, an environmental field biology major at Lewis-Clark State College, it's an opportunity to see what life would be like without the

Environmental Protection Agency.

"The pollution is unbelievable. It is truly something to behold."

People in Lewiston think they know about bad smells because of the Potlatch Corp. mill, he said, but they don't know anything until they have lived next to an oil refinery. Both men, members of the Idaho **National Guard's** 116th Engineer Battalion headquartered at Lewiston, are on a four-day leave in Qatar this week.

Well over 400 men and women from northern Idaho are among 1,700 Idahoans in the 116th Brigade Combat Team based in Kirkuk.

"It's a little breathing room," said Staff Sgt. Ernie Paquette, an Arizonian with U.S. Central Command in Qatar.

Soldiers relax a few days in Qatar, go to the gym, swim, shop, then go back to work in Iraq. Qatar is just half the size of Idaho County but with almost half a million people.

It is a largely barren, oil-rich emirate jutting into the Persian Gulf from the eastern border of Saudi Arabia and a safe haven for American military personnel.

Woodall, 33, and Schultz, 28, weren't willing to talk too much about combat conditions in a telephone call to the Lewiston Tribune Tuesday.

"Yeah, it does happen, when you least expect it," said Woodall to a question about whether they have been fired on.

Schultz said he's had some eerie feelings at times, but nothing happened. He blames it on nerves.

"If the worst thing I have to deal with here is nerves, I'll go home a happy man," he said.

Both men are impressed at the commonalities between the Iraqis and Americans. Woodall said a conversation with a Kurd interpreter was about their gardens, growing vegetables, planting trees, having a home.

Most Iraqis are just average people not interested in making a political statement, no grand schemes, just looking to have their children grow up and raise their own families, Schultz said. They're tired of worrying about going to the market and getting blown up or shot at.

The nation won't change in the year the 116th will spend in Iraq, Woodall said, but America wasn't built in a year.

"Where we're really going to make the biggest impact is the kids. They're the next generation of Iraqi leaders. Winning them over, showing them we care and helping them, that's where it's really going to make a difference."

The elections were a success, he said, and Iraqi citizens are overjoyed to have their own government and to start building their own destiny.

"Everybody I've met is the nicest people. At certain times it's even hard to imagine there's a war going on," Woodall said.

A lot of people are getting satellite dishes and cell phones, things forbidden under Saddam Hussein. They have little concept of the freedoms Americans enjoy, he said.

"It's amazing to watch them. They're a growing civilization."

"I want people to know with all the bad things that happen in Iraq, there's a lot more good things and there's a lot of people happy we're here," Schultz said.

Soldiers are like celebrities to kids, Schultz said, maybe in part because of the candy they fill their pockets with.

"They play a lot outside. When we end up stopping somewhere, inevitably there's kids." And they all want to shake hands, maybe get a piece of candy, and hang out.

"Kids go gaga over seeing troops."

Schultz is a medic assigned to a personal security detachment for Team Government. That's a group of officers and higher ranking enlisted personnel who work with Kirkuk's local government on infrastructure construction.

"I make those guys like lieutenant colors remain safe and unharmed," he said, laughing at the suggesting it sounds like a babysitting job.

His battalion commander, Lt. Col. Steve Knutzen of Clarkston, frequently is among those he's protecting, Schultz said.

"They are our responsibility," Schultz said. He and other security personnel take carloads of Americans to their downtown offices or sometimes into the outlying areas for meetings with local chieftains and sheiks.

"That's actually a lot of fun," he said.

At their destinations, the drivers work with local Iraqis, usually Kurdish paramilitary hired as security guards, to keep the area secure.

"If there is a security problem, one of our security personnel is there to get them out before anything drastic happens," Schultz said.

Woodall's primary role is supply and logistics for the battalion.

That means making sure soldiers have equipment that works wherever they need it, which can mean moving it from base to base. His unit oversees construction on the bases and humanitarian work off base geared toward children. Soldiers are working on their own time, Woodall said, to figure out what schools need and get it for them.

"We as soldiers, we don't need anything," Woodall said, listing recent menus that included lobster, king crab, steak and shrimp. "But it's the children up here, they're pretty poor."

Support from home, knowing people care, is the most important thing, as they look forward to coming home for good next January, both men said.

**Alaska's Military Youth Academy Graduates Record
Number Guard's Youth Academy Sets Another
Record with 107 Crossing The Stage: Re-Starting
Their Lives Fresh, Anew**

State of Alaska

Department of Military & Veterans Affairs

Office of Public Affairs

7 March 2005

For Immediate Release

Story by Sergeant First Class Janet Carter, 117th MPAD

CAMP CARROLL, Alaska – After more than five months of rigorous training, the Alaska Military Youth Academy (AMYA) graduated 107 cadets from around the state this past Friday (March 4) at Fort Richardson's Buckner Field House.

"You became part of a team," Timothy Jones, Director of the AMYA, told the graduates. "You accepted the challenge, and you have made it." He spoke to an audience of cadets, family members, friends and neighbors who nearly filled the capacity of the field house.

The Alaska **National Guard's** ChalleNGe Program is designed for "at risk" youth, 16 to 18 years of age, who have left school, but want to turn their lives in a positive direction. The course, which is funded by both the state and federal governments, uses academic, vocational, and adventure-based, physically challenging training to motivate and change the lives of its students.

The 22 weeks of in-residence training include academic studies, vocational instruction, life skills, military skills, and self discipline. The goals of this training are to develop life-coping skills, educational excellence, vocational training, responsible citizenship, healthy life skills, leadership skills, physical fitness, and community involvement through service projects.

The highly-structured environment allows students to focus their attention on studies and to learn the value of teamwork and responsibility.

After graduating from this phase of the program, cadets must still meet specific performance and reporting standards for 12 months. This includes weekly contact with assigned mentors, employment and / or continuing education, and they must report to Academy staff monthly.

The program had its start back in 1992 when Mr. Dan Donohue, Chief of Public Affairs at the **National Guard** Bureau, got the idea rolling. By 1993, Alaska had established it's own program and has been operating with ever increasing success since then.

National Guard Program Changes Lives of At-Risk Teenagers

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New York Jewish Times

8 March 2005

By Doug Sample

AFPS

Cadet Michael Redd and Army 1st Lt. Teddy Call of the Aiken, S.C., Youth ChalleNGe camp, were among dozens of cadets and leaders who came to Washington to ask for more funding for the program. Redd, a former drug dealer, graduated from the program in December, earning the "Most Outstanding Cadet" award. He is set to join the Army upon returning to South Carolina next week.

Photo by Sgt. 1st Class Doug Sample, USA / DoD Photo

Though he came from a stable family background in Brooklyn, N.Y., former National Basketball Association star and current talk show host John Salley, who serves as a national spokesperson for the National Guard's "Youth ChalleNGe" program, explained why he relates to what many at-risk youth go through.

"I had a great upbringing -- a mother and father that cared about me. ... I had coaches who looked out for me," Salley said. "But I also wanted to do what everybody else did. I wanted to be in this crazy crew. And as I think back of my friends -- Sam, Don, Lloyd, Pierre -- all these kids are dead."

That message hit home to dozens of at-risk students who once faced the same fate and who came here to meet with lawmakers to urge them to increase funding for Youth ChalleNGe.

The students, many of them former drug dealers and gang members who dropped out of high school, all graduated from the 17-month military-style program that has helped thousands like them earn high school diplomas or equivalency certificates and put them back on the road to life.

"It was just a matter of time before I ended up dead or in jail, so I decided to take one last chance at life -- get my life in order," said Isaiah Melenciano, 19, of Albuquerque, N.M., now a specialist in the Army.

Melenciano was a straight-A student and basketball player in high school, an advanced piano student and an expert in shop class. However, he said, he found himself on the wrong path and traded his good grades for a life of drugs and gangs. "I was doing all the wrong things, hanging out late at night" he said. "I was good in school, but as soon as left the building it all just left my head."

But Melenciano was smart enough to know his life was headed in the wrong direction. He joined Youth ChalleNGe on the advice of a friend who had gone through the program.

He graduated in June 2002 and joined the military two days prior to graduation. He is assigned to a National Guard air defense artillery unit in Roswell, N.M.

"I decided that once I put my mind to something as demanding as the military, I was real

good at it," he said. "If you've got someone on you all the time, it makes you better."

The first words to come out of Jessica Worsech's mouth are usually 'Yes, sir' or 'No, sir.' You tell her to never mind the formalities, and she responds, "Yes, sir." She is a whole new Jessica, much more respectful of others, and a far cry from the Helena, Mont., native who came to Youth ChalleNGe in Dillon a few weeks ago. She is disciplined, smarter and more physically fit than ever, ready for a life in the Marine Corps, she said. She plans to join the Corps upon graduating from the program. "A lot of my family were in the Marines," she explained.

She said life at the Youth ChalleNGe campus is difficult, because she misses her family. And the training is tough, she said, but "I've learned to accept it."

She admits drugs and alcohol made life much more tougher, especially for her family. She said she came to Youth ChalleNGe "out of fear of losing my family."

"They were hurt by the things I was doing," she said.

The 16-year old said she spent most days skipping school, hanging out with friends and drinking. "One year I skipped school every day for an entire year," she said. She had dropped out.

Today, she smiles when she says that life is behind her now, and that she will get her high school equivalency certificate upon completing the program. "I love my new way of life 100 percent," she said.

Cadet Michael Redd's story is much the same as those of his peers. As with many Youth ChalleNGe students, drugs were a major problem for him. Redd said he earned money selling drugs. "I just stopped caring about school, because I saw money," he said. "So I ran to (that money), instead of doing what I should have."

As Redd prepares for an Army career -- he leaves for in-processing this month -- he said some of his buddies that he hung out with in Aiken, S.C., are in jail or still on the streets. Redd said he no longer cares to live that way.

"That's not a way to live," he explained. "I've known people who have died over some stupid stuff like drugs."

Redd graduated Youth ChalleNGe in December, earning the "Most Outstanding Cadet" award. He said the program really made a difference in his life.

"It just kind of clicked when I joined Youth ChalleNGe that I can go to college and do something with my life," he said. "If it hadn't been for Youth ChalleNGe, I would have been working a minimum wage job somewhere. Now, I can make something of myself." The reason for the dramatic change in many students who come to the Youth ChalleNGe program is the environment, said Army Maj. Art Longoria, director of the New Mexico program.

"That environment is very structured, military disciplined, and the kind of order that many students want in their life," he said. "Some of them may have not had strong adult influences in their life. ... We give them that kind of structure, then offer them opportunities along the way to experience success." Longoria said after just a few weeks in the program, "you can see the change in students."

“They begin to dream, they start to believe that they can do something else,” he said. “It’s amazing to them make that transition.”

Army 1st Lt. Teddy Call, director for the Youth ChalleNGe camp in Aiken, said the program gives students a second opportunity by “increasing self-esteem, and giving the drive and motivation for the future.”

“The goal is to make them a productive, functioning part of their community,” he said. “That’s all we want, for them to go back and have the educational skills or the work ethic and work skills to be productive in their community.”

Call said though many aspects of the Youth ChalleNGe program are military in nature, the aim is not to recruit students for the military. However, he added, “a good number of them (19 percent) will decide to join the military after graduation.”

GENERAL

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State Taxpayers Providing Relief To Military Families

New York Times
March 8, 2005

By Shaila Dewan

Taxpayers can donate their refunds in many states to the homeless, to victims of child abuse, to protecting endangered species or to a group of needy people whose taxpayer-financed salaries do not always make ends meet - military families.

Illinois led the way last year when it added a Military Family Relief Fund to the list of charities on its state tax forms, collecting \$204,000. Five more states have followed suit, and at least 21 more, including New York, have introduced legislation to do so next year.

As of the end of last week, the funds had collected slightly more than \$400,000 for the 2004 tax year, to be distributed in grants of about \$500 to a few thousand dollars. For the most basic grants, the only requirement is that a family member has been activated in the fight against terror for 30 days or more.

The money is intended to help cover property taxes, car repairs, rent, equipment not supplied by the armed forces, or anything that might be a reach for the families of **National Guard** members and reservists struggling with the domestic hazards of wartime, including loss of income, long separations, disability or sudden death.

The measures are part of a movement by states to fill what they perceive as a void in federal support for military families. Several states have created tax breaks, increased death benefits, added tuition assistance - even provided discounts on hunting licenses and free admission to state parks. The relief funds rely mostly on citizen largess, though contributions to charity are tax deductible and reduce federal and state revenues.

"It's because Congress has failed to set a safety net for military families that lose heads of

household," said Governor Bill Richardson of New Mexico, which recently added \$250,000 life insurance policies for its **National Guard** soldiers to augment the \$12,000 federal death benefit. "And the states are stepping in with humanitarian initiatives."

New Mexico is one state on the verge of voting on whether to put a check-off box for military family relief on its tax returns. The check-off usually allows taxpayers to give all or part of their refund to their choice of listed charities.

Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn of Illinois, who pushed for the relief legislation his state enacted and has since visited several other states to help them set up their own funds, said the idea of giving to soldiers' families was not new. His idea borrowed heavily from a Civil Relief Society formed by the New York **National Guard** to help service members during the Depression, Mr. Quinn said.

"We don't see this in any way as charity but rather a token of gratitude from the men and women of Illinois to people who have answered the call of duty," he said.

Under the Illinois guidelines, any family with a **National Guard** member or reservist deployed since Sept. 11, 2001, is eligible to receive \$500. Those who are wounded in action or whose income dropped by at least 30 percent when they went from civilian to military pay can get an additional \$2,000.

Pamela Bout and her four children are among the 5,000 families who have received grants of at least \$500. Ms. Bout, a school bus driver in Gurnee, Ill., whose husband, Robert, is a Navy reservist deployed last July, is navigating single-parenthood, a new health insurance policy and the anxiety of her husband's service in the Middle East.

"I've had to deal with so much since he's been gone," she said. "Cars breaking down, the dishwasher breaking down - everything that could happen since he's left, has happened. These little things add up."

Were it not for help from the state, Ms. Bout said, she would not have had a Christmas meal or gifts last December.

In part because of their low costs, the relief funds sail through state legislatures, lawmakers said. But the support of these funds varies. Michigan has raised the most, at \$250,000, and Delaware trails the group with \$900. Receipts in the other states with check-off boxes this year - California, Maine, Illinois, Rhode Island and South Carolina - fall in between.

In Illinois, the military fund received about 11 percent of the \$1.8 million raised through check-offs on returns last year. The relief fund ranked fourth in popularity, after wildlife, child abuse prevention and breast cancer research. This year the relief fund has accumulated \$55,600, compared with \$38,600 in the same period last year, Mr. Quinn said.

In Rhode Island, the fund has received almost as much, \$11,900, as the other six charities combined. In California, the military families fund ranks in the middle in popularity, far less than research in Alzheimer's disease but on par with food pantries.

Part-time soldiers on long full-time assignments do not always face financial crises. About a third of families gain income when a husband or wife is deployed, roughly the same number that lose money, according to a survey by the National Military Family

Association.

Peggy Gomez of Berwyn, Ill., said that managing a family alone could in itself be stressful and costly. Her family's income increased a bit when her husband, Sgt. First Class Hector Gomez, was deployed with the **National Guard**. But Ms. Gomez had to contend with broken storm windows, a leaky bathtub and wind damage to their roof, she said.

It was the first time she had handled the family finances, and she turned to Mr. Quinn's office for help. His office prodded her insurer to respond more quickly on the home repairs, she said, and gave her a grant that went toward property taxes.

**Military News Programs Secure A Public Outlet;
Tampa Bay Area Government Access Channels Air
Defense Department Programming That Also Goes To
Military Bases And Features Anchors In Uniform.**

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St. Petersburg Times

March 9, 2005

By Candace Rondeaux

How's this for a niche network - a TV audience of 2.6-million, all dressed in fatigues.

The Pentagon Channel has been a favorite with the troops for years. But these days you don't need a crew cut to watch it. All you need to do is tune in to Pinellas County's Channel 18 at 5:30 p.m. six days a week.

The Pentagon Channel's 24-hour news programming was originally aimed at American troops. But the U.S. Department of Defense recently has enlisted public and government access cable channels to help spread its message, including Channel 18. The county-run cable channel began running two half-hour Pentagon Channel programs, Army Newswatch and Focus on the Force, in January.

"The Pentagon programs are fresh and are new, and they give us a chance to fill that slot while we work on developing new in-house programs," said county communications director Marcia Crawley.

Defense Department satellite feeds also are aired on Hillsborough County government's Channel 22 and Tampa's city government channel CCTV.

Army Newswatch, produced in Washington, D.C., and Focus on the Force, produced in Germany, are part of a roster of 24 such shows produced by the Pentagon and beamed around the world via satellite.

Before it was launched in May, the C-SPAN-style network for the military was originally broadcast on closed-circuit Defense Department television. With an operating budget of

\$6-million for the 2004-05 fiscal year, the Pentagon Channel reaches 136 American military bases in 177 countries around the world. In operation less than a year, the channel began streaming its programming to its Web site, <http://www.pentagonchannel.mil>, 24 hours a day, and it is now distributed by 10 companies, including TimeWarner and Knology, to the general public.

Last month, the Defense Department network expanded its reach considerably after EchoStar Communications Corp. agreed to offer the Pentagon Channel to Dish Network's satellite television subscribers for free, bringing the channel's total general viewership to about 11.6-million, Pentagon officials said.

The Pentagon Channel has the look and feel of CNN, except the news anchors are sometimes in uniform. The programs shown on Channel 18 and others on the Pentagon Channel cover everything from the latest changes in benefits for **National Guard** and Reserve members to updates on American military missions around the world.

"People forget that we have troops in Bosnia, in Africa and Germany, so this is a chance to let people know about what's going with the forces around the world," said Allison Barber, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs.

The Pentagon Channel's commercial and fee-free programming is proving a popular choice for cash-strapped local government access channels. Channel 18's estimated annual budget is about \$800,000, but only about 60 percent of its programming is produced in-house, county officials said.

Pentagon officials said they do not have a complete list of local government access distributors. But Barber said public education channels in Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina and Virginia have told the department they are carrying the military programming.

Pentagon Channel programs cover a wide range of issues, but you're not likely to see much coverage of controversial military topics such as the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal or the secret military tribunals of detainees held at Guantanamo Bay. And that, some media analysts say, could be problematic.

"There's nothing wrong with the military bringing this onto the base," said Robert Snyder, director of Rutgers University-Newark's journalism and media Studies program in New Jersey. "But broadcasting Pentagon programs on a public access cable channel is basically going to be the equivalent of a public relations channel intruding into the public sphere. They shouldn't be broadcast and published out into the general world as if they were an independent source of journalism."

In recent months, the Bush administration has come under heavy fire from media critics who complain that the White House has manipulated news.

The criticism grew louder in January after it was revealed that the U.S. Department of

Education paid conservative pundit Armstrong Williams \$240,000 to promote the president's "No Child Left Behind" policy. Critics also point to revelations last month about the dubious credentials of White House reporter "Jeff Gannon," whose real name is James Dale Guckert. Until he resigned last month, Guckert worked for Talon News and GOPUSA, conservative Web sites financed by a Texas Republican.

Barber acknowledged that American military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan occasionally make for tough topics to report on. But she dismissed the idea that the Pentagon Channel is an outlet for government propaganda.

"We accept the fact that we're at war, and there are some tough stories to tell and we're going to tell them," Barber said. "We know that there are sacrifices people are making out there and people need to know about them."

Crawley, who helps oversee Channel 18's programming, agrees. She added that the military programs are a great way for Tampa Bay area residents with family members in the military to stay up-to-date on the troops. Besides, she said, the two military programs might air only temporarily and could be replaced by new programs the county hopes to produce in coming months.

America Supports You: University Offers Scholarships

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Armed Forces Information Service

10 March 2005

By Jim Garamone

WASHINGTON, March 10, 2005 – A Pennsylvania university is putting its values and money to work for the sons and daughters of servicemembers who make the ultimate sacrifice.

"It's just the right thing to do," said Widener University President James T. Harris said during a telephone interview with the American Forces Press Service.

The genesis of the idea came when faculty and students at the four-year undergraduate school began being called up and deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq. "I was speaking with a fellow faculty member," Harris said, "and we wondered if there was something we could do."

Harris said he went back to his office and began "crunching numbers." He found enough money in the scholarship budget to offer four full scholarships to the university. The offer equals \$100,000 for one student for a four-year degree.

Harris said the university "took it out of hide," and he did no additional fund-raising to get the money.

He presented the idea to the university's board, and the board members unanimously approved it. The board also went along with the program's long-term commitment –

some of the servicemembers killed in action have young children who won't be old enough for college for many more years.

Harris began the process after the November election because "I didn't want politics to intrude. No matter how you feel about the war in Iraq, as Americans, we should still honor those who serve."

It's called Widener CARES – for Children of Active and Reserves Educational Scholarships. The program is open to the sons and daughters of servicemembers killed in action in operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. It is a national program.

The university – in Chester, Pa., part of the greater Philadelphia area – spent some of its early life as Pennsylvania Military College. The school today still retains a "good-sized" Army and Air Force ROTC program, Harris said.

"We think this is an appropriate thing for a university to do," he said. "We talk all the time about educating young men and women to be good citizens. This is a way for our university to show that the institution is also a 'good citizen.'"

The first children in the program could begin in September, Harris said. He said the program can take a huge financial burden off families already coping with the loss of a loved one, often the primary breadwinner in the family.

He said he hopes other colleges follow Widener's example. "There are more than 3,000 colleges and universities in America," he said. "If each one offered a scholarship, most of the children of those killed in action could receive a college education."

End

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