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Weekly News for National Guard Families

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Websites:

National Guard Family Program Online Communities for families and youth:

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

<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/>

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 info 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>

The **Guard Family Team Building** website provides online training and access to valuable contact information, documents, and links to assist in meeting the challenges of Guard life.

<http://www.gftb.org>

The **Guard Family Action Plan** website provides information on actions to improve Family Programs, benefits, and entitlements for the National Guard Community.

<http://www.gfap.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.ang.af.mil.

National Guard, State Agencies Prepare For Rita

Shreveport Times (LA)

September 22, 2005

By Mike Hasten, Gannett News Service

BATON ROUGE -- About 1,300 Louisiana National Guard troops are poised to move into the southwestern corner of Louisiana to handle flooding, security and medical needs should Hurricane Rita inflict damages there on its way to the Texas coast.

"We're not going to move forces into an impact area until we're positive what has happened," Col. Pete Schneider said Wednesday. "The key here is the track of that hurricane."

If the storm hits the Galveston-Houston area of Texas as expected, Cameron and Calcasieu parishes are likely to suffer damage. If the storm takes a northward turn and hits Louisiana, more troops will be needed.

Schneider said 300 members of an engineering group based in northern Louisiana has almost completed its work in Jefferson Parish and will be sent to the area, as will 700 members of an infantry outfit to provide security and 300 members of a medical unit.

National Guard leaders began working Saturday on a plan for Rita, said Major Pat Simon, public information officer for the Guard's Gillis W. Long Center in Carville. Included was filling slots left by the expected return of about 1,500 Texas National Guard troops to their home state.

Schneider said the Texas National Guard group left Wednesday. If Texas officials call for assistance, Louisiana will respond by sending guardsmen, he said.

As Rita moved across the Gulf of Mexico, the state Department of Social Services coordinated the evacuation of special needs shelters at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux and McNeese State University in Lake Charles. The patients at Nicholls were being moved to Baton Rouge and Alexandria on Wednesday, while those at McNeese were being moved to Shreveport and Bossier City.

The department is prepared to move special needs evacuees at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, if necessary, said DSS Undersecretary Terri Ricks. The department also is preparing to evacuate 9,800 people currently housed in shelters below Interstate 10 if Rita shows signs of heading toward the Louisiana coast, she said.

While the 14,600 spots available at shelter sites above I-10 are enough for special needs patients, they wouldn't be nearly enough if coastal parishes have to be evacuated, Ricks said. About 4,000 Louisiana residents evacuated to Texas are now in shelters in Tennessee and Arkansas.

1,100 Alabama Guardsmen Off to Louisiana

The Birmingham News

September 27, 2005

More than 1,100 Alabama **National Guard** members have been sent to Louisiana to help parts of that state recover from Hurricane Rita, and 40 headed Monday to Houston on a Rita-related assignment.

About 1,300 Alabama Army and Air **National Guard** members now are on hurricane relief duty.

State Guard spokesman Norman Arnold said more than 1,100 Army and Air Guard members left Saturday and Sunday for the Alexandria, La., area. Their missions will include search and rescue, debris-clearing, security, communications and food and water distribution. Arnold said the Guard members are on 31-day orders and "will stay as long as needed."

The 40 Army Guard members who headed to Houston on Monday are taking 16 refueling tankers and one wrecker, said Lt. Col. Bob Horton, another Guard spokesman.

Horton said about 50 state Army Guard soldiers are providing security and distributing food and water along parts of the Alabama coast hit by Hurricane Katrina. In Mississippi, about 50 Alabama Army and Air Guard members are on duty, and some of the Air Guard members are helping a hospital in the coastal community of Waveland, which was hit hard by Katrina.

During the past month, all of Alabama's Army and Air **National Guard** units have had members involved in emergency relief operations.

KY Army Guard Unit Leaving for Gulf Coast[Back to Table of Contents](#)

WHAS-TV 11

September 27, 2005

A small group from Louisville will join 500 Kentucky Army **National Guard** soldiers on hurricane patrol in the Gulf Coast. Monday night, the members of Louisville's 1163rd Medical Company packed up at the fairgrounds to get ready to head to Louisiana. They'll spend 30 days treating any Army or police personnel injured in the Gulf.

They're not sure what they'll run into, but they're ready to help. Captain Dan Manning with the 1163rd Medical Company said, "What we know about the area, a lot of

containment, preventive medicine is a big issue for us." Pfc. Ashley Driver, also with the 1163rd said, "Any second life can change, keeps family together. Horrible to take a natural disaster to bring people closer, it's good to know that everybody here cares about everybody else."

There are already 372 Kentucky **National Guard** airmen and soldiers deployed in the relief effort.

Siblings Head into Harm's Way

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The Daily Herald

September 26, 2005

The Weatherspoons and Hydes have much in common with most Utah County families -- they are tight-knit, patriotic and God-fearing people who believe in doing what's right.

However that's where the similarities end. The Weatherspoons and Hydes are sending four family members off to war in Iraq.

Shawn and Carrie Weatherspoon, married for five years, found out three months ago they'd be deployed to Iraq. As a staff sergeant in the Utah Army **National Guard's** 120th Quartermaster Detachment, Shawn, 25, is both Carrie's husband and the non-commissioned officer to whom she reports. Weatherspoon said he had just returned from a humanitarian mission to Nicaragua with his unit in the spring when he got word they would be headed overseas again.

"We got back and they said 'Guess what? You guys are leaving again,' " he said. "My first thought was, jeez, we just barely got home, but then I was excited."

Though Weatherspoon is an 8-year veteran of the Utah **National Guard**, he was joined last year by his wife Pfc. Carrie Weatherspoon, 26, her older sister, Pfc. Jessica Hyde, 28 and the sisters' younger brother Pfc. Bill Hyde, 25.

Part of the Guard's 120th Quartermaster Detachment based out of Springville, the four are currently at Fort Bliss, Texas, where they're undergoing advanced training before shipping off to Iraq. Once there, they will unit will conduct water purification operations, other equipment-related duties and security assignments.

Along with 91 other recently called up Utah Guardsmen, the Weatherspoons and the Hydes will serve at least 12 months in Iraq for no longer than an 18-month deployment.

"I've always wanted to be in the Guard," Carrie Weatherspoon said, "but my parents were in the military and they didn't approve while I was under their roof."

Shawn and Carrie discussed her interest in signing up and the obvious benefits and college money. The staff sergeant said he gave his wife the same talk he had with his father several years before.

"We work at Wal-Mart," he said. "We don't have money for college."

But by joining the military, Uncle Sam could help them realize their dreams to finish their education through the G.I. Bill.

"I wasn't under my parents roof anymore, so I said why the hell not?" Carrie Weatherspoon said.

What she didn't realize was that her sister Jessica and brother Bill also planned to become citizen soldiers.

Jessica Hyde, who signed up at the same time as Carrie, said the events of Sept. 11 were a major motivation in her decision. However, for the mother of 6-year-old Angela who will stay with her grandparents during her mother's deployment to Iraq, the call was not an easy one.

"I talked to (Shawn) and he said if you want to do it, sign up and go," Jessica Hyde said. "I'm proud to serve my country. It's something I've wanted to do my whole life."

Bill Hyde was unequivocal about why he became a Utah Guardsman.

"To protect my two sisters," he said. "What's better, going to war with people you don't know, or people you do know?"

Marie Bigler, Shawn's mother, said though she's concerned for the four, she knows they all want to be there.

"Carrie told me a long time ago 'I want to be with my husband. I would rather be with him by his side than be home worrying and waiting for him,'" Bigler said.

She admits having her son and daughter-in-law go to a distant and dangerous place like Iraq is painful, but she supports them fully.

"They act cocky, but they're scared inside," she said.

The siblings' parents Doug and Pat Hyde, both Navy medics in the Vietnam war, taught their children duty to God and country.

"A lot of people expected me to be upset (when they joined), but I'm extremely proud," Pat Hyde said. "I don't feel anything is going to happen to them at all ... I'm pretty much at peace with it."

The Hyde siblings understand it was not easy for their parents to watch them join the Guard and then be called up to go to Iraq.

"They see how we've changed and grown," Jessica Hyde said. "I think they understand why we're doing this."

Bill Hyde said with three out of the four Hyde kids going to war, it's natural that his parents are going to be nervous.

"As a parent, you worry, you stress out," he said.

However, to the relief of his parents, and based on a federal regulation preventing all siblings of a family from joining the military, the Hyde's son John will be staying home.

Carrie Weatherspoon vocalized what her parents may only be thinking.

"They love us, they're proud of us, (but) they don't know if all of us, part of us, or none of us are coming back," she said.

"We're all coming back," Carrie Weatherspoon reassured them.

Pat Hyde said it's a comfort knowing the four will be looking out for one another, and that Shawn will be there to protect her daughter Carrie.

"I'm sure they'll watch each other's backs," she said.

Bigler said the unity of the four family members going into harm's way is a definite advantage.

"I feel sorry for anyone coming against them," she said, sentiments echoed by her son.

"I mean who better to have to cover your back than your family," Shawn Weatherspoon said.

Del. Guard Veteran Views Helping Victims as A Duty, [Back to Table of Contents](#) a Privilege

Delaware Online.com

The News Journal

September 20, 2005

By Mike Billington / The News Journal

The voices were loud, insistent.

Anxious.

Scared.

Senior Master Sgt. Gordon Riggs stepped forward and spoke calmly to some of the people standing in line to see government officials in Hattiesburg, Miss. Within a few minutes they had stopped trying to cut ahead of others who were equally frustrated, hot and dirty.

"People are tired of hearing that they need to hang on," Riggs, 53, said. "They're afraid the money is going to run out before they get what they need. They're afraid the food and water are going to run out. I understand that, but at the same time we have to have some order or nothing will get done."

Riggs, of Middletown, a 35-year veteran of the Delaware Air National Guard, was among the first to arrive in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina chewed up the Gulf Coast. Like all Delaware Guard troops there, he's a volunteer. Unlike them, he'd just returned home from his second tour of duty in Southwest Asia when he flew to Mississippi.

"I was home for about four days when I came down here Aug. 31," Riggs said. "Just long enough to put 43 miles on my new Harley."

Those who know him are not surprised he went to the Gulf Coast. They aren't surprised he's still there.

"Gordon is a longtime Special Olympics volunteer," said Ann Grunert, "so, no, I'm not surprised at all. He's someone who really cares about other people and the community."

Grunert, executive director of Special Olympics Delaware, said Riggs and other members of the National Guard have worked with the organization for the past decade.

"They don't think twice about helping someone else," she said. "They just do it."

Riggs, a member of the 166th Logistical Support Flight, is a traffic management specialist. In Hattiesburg he's not just managing supplies, he's delivering them as well.

"We just got back from a multipurpose center where we took a truck to pick up tarps for people who lost their roofs and delivered food and water," said Riggs, a Spring Mill resident.

A privilege to help

He is also helping to set up distribution centers and, when needed, pulling security details.

"We're doing whatever we can because this is such a disaster," Riggs said. "Lots of places still have no power, no fresh water, no food."

It is an emotional time for the people who lost everything in the storm, and for soldiers and airmen such as Riggs.

"Things are so bad here and people need so much that sometimes you just have to turn away to hold back the tears," he said.

Maj. Gen. Frank Vavala said the commitment shown by Riggs is common among National Guard troops.

"Here's a guy who comes home from duty in Southwest Asia and, when he sees Americans in trouble, he gets on an airplane and goes to help," said Vavala, the adjutant general of the Delaware National Guard. "And he didn't go alone. We have about 200 people there. You can't buy that kind of commitment. You can't put a price tag on it."

State Sen. Dori Connor, R-New Castle, agreed.

"You can't say enough about them and what they do for all of us," said Connor, an honorary commander of the 166th Airlift Wing. "They're performing more miracles down there than we'll ever know about."

Riggs isn't sure the work he and other Guard troops are doing is miraculous, but he is sure that it's important.

"We're up at the crack of dawn and we go to bed late at night and nobody's had a day off and nobody's looking for a day off," he said. "These are Americans in trouble and it's our duty, and our privilege, to help them."

Four Cities Hold Send-Off Ceremonies for Guard Troops

The Associated Press State & Local Wire

September 23, 2005

STORM LAKE, Iowa -- Family members and friends cheered, waved flags and displayed signs in four Iowa cities to show their support for about 115 Iowa Army **National Guard** soldiers mobilized for active duty.

The troops are among 600 soldiers called up in support of the 1st Battalion, 133rd Infantry as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The main body will ship out in early October.

"I'm pretty excited," said Guardsman Louie De Roos, of Storm Lake. "It's something I've been trained to do. And they always need mechanics."

De Roos was among 18 soldiers recognized during a send-off at Storm Lake High School on Thursday. Several hundred well-wishers gathered to say farewell to husbands and fathers and brothers and sons.

Storm Lake Mayor Jon Kruse offered thanks to the soldiers.

"While you are gone, your community will do all it can to defend those who have sacrificed for you," he said.

Jonathan De Roos of Alta, wearing a camouflage T-shirt and cap, made no bones about his pride for his uncle.

"I think he's my favorite uncle," he said.

Similar send-off ceremonies were held in Waterloo, Davenport and at the guard's headquarters at Camp Dodge in Johnston.

The soldiers will be deployed for 18 months of active duty. They will go to Fort Shelby, near Hattiesburg, Miss., for training before heading to Iraq.

In Waterloo, Nicole Whitney, of Manly, watched her husband, Robert, climb on a bus. She will raise the couple's 1-year-old daughter on her own for a while.

"I'll take it one day at a time, that's all I can do," Nicole Whitney said.

Michelle Nielsen, who watched the tearful goodbye, had a job to do.

As a military wife and a coordinator of the 133rd's Family Readiness Group in Waterloo, she knows what it's like. Her husband returned this summer from a 16-month stint in Afghanistan.

"My husband went on the last deployment, I know how your feeling," Nielsen told Whitney.

In Davenport, soldiers in battle-dress uniforms marched in column formation across Brady Street Stadium as friends and family members waved American flags and hoisted banners and signs that read, "We Support Our Troops."

"These are Iowa heroes," said Lt. Col. Robert King, retired public affairs officer for the

Iowa **National Guard**. "They are following in the footsteps of many others in a long and proud history of Iowans who have answered the call."

The soldiers included Pvt. Stephen Jaster, 21, a self-employed handyman in civilian life and a supply clerk in the Guard.

"I will miss my family, but I have trust in these soldiers," Jaster said. "I am deploying with very good people."

BENEFITS

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Rendell Looks at More Benefits for National Guard

The Sentinel

September 19, 2005

By [Jennifer Nesbitt](#) Sentinel reporter

Editor's note: This story is part of a series examining the five focal points that Gov. Ed Rendell identified as his fall agenda.

LEWISTOWN — Veterans and National Guard members are not getting the state financial support they need, said Gov. Ed Rendell in a press conference last week.

Because of this, the governor said he has decided to make increasing benefits a priority for his fall agenda.

Rendell said he some elements of legislation he proposed last spring were not put into law by the Legislature, and legislation is needed that would address the needs of those on guard duty and their families.

Some support Rendell said he would like to see includes aid for the families of soldiers killed in action, college access for surviving spouses of soldiers killed in action, deferment of student loans for deployed soldiers and tax benefits to those who employ deployed soldiers, among others.

Bill Dippery, director of the Mifflin County Veterans' Affairs Office, said the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs offers many of the benefits that the governor is proposing, but he said offering further state support is a good thing.

"I think that's great ... They certainly deserve it," Dippery said of local soldiers.

Dippery said soldiers who are being called to Iraq and injured or killed deserve any benefits that the government is willing to give out, and federal benefits are increasing.

"If he (Rendell) wants to supplement what Veterans' Affairs is doing, I 100 percent

support it," Dippery said.

Rep. Larry Sather, R-McConnellstown, who sits on the Veterans' Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, said in May the House of Representatives passed a 12-bill package providing support to reservists and National Guardsman.

Sather said the administration is working with the with the Senate to get the package passed.

He said increasing support for veterans, reservists and National Guardsman is important right now, which he said is evident by the response to Hurricane Katrina by guardsman.

"It's already in the pipeline," Sather said of increasing benefits. "It's slow, but sometimes the Legislature works better when it is slow."

Sather added that while increasing benefits for military, it also is important to increase funding for all who deal in emergency preparedness, like fire companies.

GUARD IN IRAQ

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48th Will Range Widely in New Iraq Security Role

Atlanta Journal and Constitution
September 22, 2005

By Moni Basu

Camp Striker, Iraq -- The 48th Brigade Combat Team's new mission in Iraq will involve providing security for major highways and bases throughout the country, brigade officials said Wednesday.

Instead of patrolling and securing specific areas of Iraq, the 4,500 soldiers in the Georgia Army National Guard unit will be splintered among several camps and will focus more on security than on combat missions.

"This is a totally separate and different mission," said Lt. Col. Mark London, the brigade's operations officer. "This is a theater security mission."

London said one of the 48th's four combat battalions would be dedicated solely to convoy security.

Another will be posted at a base north of Baghdad to provide base security, while a third will go to Tallil Air Base in southern Iraq as a security force for that facility.

The fourth combat battalion will head west near the Syrian border to work with multinational coalition forces. That battalion will be the only one responsible for controlling a specific piece of terrain.

London declined to say which battalions would be assigned to which areas for operational security reasons.

But it is believed that the 1st Battalion, 118th Field Artillery Regiment, out of Springfield, will be moving to Camp Anaconda near Balad, north of Baghdad. The battalion currently is stationed at Camp Taji, in the same vicinity.

"It's not like we are being pulled out of combat into a noncombat role," London said. "We have convoys hit every day by IEDs [improvised explosive devices], or they get ambushed."

The brigade headquarters will be located at Tallil, but there will be a forward command post located north of Baghdad.

The 48th is picking up duties from the 56th Brigade Combat Team from Texas, which is due to return to the United States at the end of the year. The 2nd Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division, based at Fort Campbell, Ky., is scheduled to take over control of the southwest Baghdad area from the 48th.

Since its arrival in Iraq in early June for a yearlong tour, the 48th has been responsible for a large area south and west of Baghdad International Airport. Some of this area stretches into what is known as the Triangle of Death because of the anti-American insurgency, fueled largely by the predominantly Sunni Muslim population.

The brigade has been engaged in missions to snuff out insurgent activity and promote reconstruction and civil affairs projects. Much of that activity will stop when it shifts gears.

Brigade Command Sgt. Major James Nelson said officers were doing all they could to keep platoons together when the 48th is dispersed.

"We try to keep teams together whenever possible," he said.

But the prospect of being separated from platoon mates or battle buddies concerned some soldiers at Camp Striker as details of the big move began trickling down into the tents.

"Separating us now is like taking away our backbone," said Sgt. Rufus Veal of the Dublin-based Alpha Company of the 148th Support Battalion. "We're like family. We need each other."

Soldiers from the brigade's support units will be sent wherever they are needed to supply the four combat battalions, London said. That means that companies of the 148th Support Battalion might be split up after having trained and deployed together for 10 months.

London said the 48th's move was part of the military's plan to reduce the number of U.S. troops in Iraq.

"As we stand up Iraqi units and as their numbers go up, ours go down," London said. "As Iraqi security forces increase, they have to restructure the battle space. And as [U.S.] units move out, they have to restructure other units to cover them."

Another National Guard unit that was providing convoy and base security -- the 29th Brigade Combat Team from Hawaii -- also is scheduled to leave Iraq by December or January.

Both the 56th BCT and the 29th BCT are conducting "critical security missions" that the 48th soldiers will assume in the weeks ahead.

No timetable has been given for the moves, but in an earlier interview Brig. Gen. Stewart Rodeheaver, commander of the 48th, said they were likely to happen in the next two months.

There are about 17 U.S. combat brigades in Iraq and a total of about 135,000 soldiers. Senior military officials recently told The Washington Post that a reduction of American forces was possible after the Iraqi national elections in December, depending on the training of Iraqi soldiers and the intensity of violence in the country.

London said 48th officials expected their role change because the Georgia soldiers came into Iraq under an off-cycle rotation. The brigade entered Iraq almost six months after the 3rd Infantry Division, to which it is now attached, and had planned for a new mission to begin as the Fort Stewart-based unit began returning home in December.

"We came in five to six months after the 3rd ID," London said. "That's why we got caught between two missions."

London acknowledged the 48th would be widely scattered but said retaining command of such a large unit should not be a problem because of current technological advances in communications.

"It will obviously be more difficult," he said. "But really, it's no different than us talking to the 108th in Mahmudiyah."

Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 108th Armor Regiment, have been based in three forward operating bases located in Mahmudiyah, Lutafiyah and Yusufiyah, near the Euphrates River south of Baghdad.

GENERAL

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Guard Fetches Plane Loads of Pooches Left Homeless by Katrina

The Arizona Republic

September 19, 2005

By Emily Bittner

Two military airplanes scheduled to fly empty from New Orleans to Phoenix instead landed in the Valley on Sunday night loaded with a vulnerable cargo: dogs abandoned in Hurricane Katrina's path. Two flights touched down in the Valley carrying 169 crates full of barking and crying dogs.

Their sounds filled the Air National Guard terminal at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport as the dogs began the last leg of what, for many, was a stressful and nearly lethal journey.

"These animals need TLC," said Kim Noetzel, spokesman for the Arizona Humane Society. "These animals need exercise. These animals need attention. We're just ready to do whatever they need."

The idea to ship the dogs to the Valley came after members of the Arizona Humane Society worked in the New Orleans shelter where they were housed. Some of the animals haven't been released from their crates in more than a week because conditions at the understaffed and overcrowded facility were so horrendous, Noetzel said.

When Arizona Humane Society leaders learned that two military planes were bringing members of New Mexico's National Guard to New Orleans and were returning to the Valley without cargo anyway, they asked the Guard to bring the dogs back with them.

The whole mission was arranged in less than 24 hours. A coordinator for the organization in charge of finding a way to transport the dogs from the airport to the Humane Society shelter searched the Internet for an Arizona livestock transporter.

The first name she saw was that of Bob Raney, the 74-year-old owner of Triple R Trucking Inc. She called, in a panic, at 4:30 p.m. Friday.

Raney volunteered immediately to provide transportation from the airport to the Humane Society's facility in south Phoenix.

"I saw all of this devastation on television," said Raney, who enlisted his brother-in-law and a retired driver to help out. "I thought that this was one way to be able to help. . . . What little bit we give back is nothing to what the devastation was."

The animals on the plane were confused and frightened while they were being loaded on the plane but calmed down after takeoff, said Arizona National Guard Sgt. Jeff Kellow.

And by this morning, all the dogs will have completed an extensive process in which they are examined by veterinarians, checked for microchips, vaccinated and profiled on www.petfinder.com so their families can find them. Many of the animals wore tags and collars.

"They belong to somebody," Kellow said.

If after efforts to reunite families and their pets don't work, Valley residents can adopt the animals.

End

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