

When duty calls, the National Guard aims to provide an umbrella of support for those on the homefront

# FOCUS on FAMILIES

by Michelle Bohlen

Nowhere, perhaps, are the life-changing demands of full-time military duty felt more acutely than in the families of those called to serve. Indeed, as National Guardsmen transition from being citizen-soldiers to serving on the front lines in the war on terrorism, dealing with these demands has become critical. The National Guard Bureau is committed to providing Guard families with services they need and is pursuing all avenues of assistance through its Family Program Office (FPO).

Army Lt. Col. Anthony E. Baker, Sr., heads up this essential operation. For him, the mission entails providing everything to help a family cope with mobilization, including pre- and post-deployments. "When the National Guard responded to the events of nine-eleven," Baker says, "our members were separated from their loved ones, jobs, communities and social settings."

The urgency to stabilize this situation is Baker's highest priority. "We must mobilize every resource available to assist them and their families to regain their footing, regardless of whether the deployment is abroad or within U.S. states and territories."

The colonel, who assumed his duties as chief of family programs last July, wears a number of different hats, ranging from being the resident expert on family issues and liaison with multiple government agencies and civilian organizations to acting as trainer and advisor on these issues and related programs within the National Guard.

To provide National Guard families with the information they need to deal with deployment, demobilization and the many other challenges they face, the FPO recently launched two new websites: [www.guardfamily.org](http://www.guardfamily.org) and [www.guard-familyyouth.org](http://www.guard-familyyouth.org).

In addition to this initiative, Baker envisions building "a robust network of volunteers" from the Active and Reserve Components; veterans service organizations, federal, state and local agen-



Above, National Guard Bureau Chief Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, speaking to AMVETS NEC attendees, fields questions about the proposed partnership from the audience (right). Below, Lt. Col. Baker briefs group on his operation.



cies; and private organizations. That such a network will work he has no doubts: "It will support our servicemembers and their families, regardless of component, before, during and after mobilizations and deployments." **AV**

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## ANSWERING the CALL—FROM the GUARD

by Beryl Love

"The National Guard Bureau is looking to partner with AMVETS in support of National Guard members and their families." Such was the invitation we received from Colonel Baker last September. And while similar letters were sent to other veterans groups, only AMVETS to date has accepted.

The partnership, according to Baker, would have "the potential of increasing the awareness of AMVETS" throughout the country, while allowing the "widest possible spectrum of support" for returning Guard members and their families.



As the Guard faces an unprecedented increase in military activity and extended deployments, it is vital to ensure that families are prepared and supported.

The challenges are unique: families involved are dispersed among more than 4,000 communities across the country. Often, they don't live near military installations where family support is readily available or, if they do, they may not be aware that such services exist or may encounter difficulty in accessing the services.

In many outlying areas, AMVETS, through its 41 departments and 1,300 posts, can assist families in accessing

the Guard Family Program networks. This will involve a sharing of information by National Guard state family program directors and AMVETS department leaders, as well as training that will be available through the Guard's new website.

A Memorandum of Understanding that formalizes the cooperative effort will be signed at the Pentagon in March by National Commander Boettcher and National Guard Bureau Chief Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum. Meanwhile, AMVETS' National Programs Department and the Guard's Family Program Office are collaborating to implement the partnership in each state.

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