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What Makes Communities Great

**50 Ideas from
Across the Country**

**Congress Focuses
on Quality of Life**

**Meet Five Change-
Making Leaders**

June 2019

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It Takes Grit

By Tim Ford, Publisher & Chief Executive Officer, ADC



Community partners celebrate The North Country's recognition as a 2019 Great American Defense Community in Watertown, N.Y. U.S. Army photo by 10th Mountain Division

When ADC launched the Great American Defense Communities program, we wanted to celebrate the remarkable ways communities enhance the quality of life for our military families. Over the past four years, we have shared stories and saw firsthand the hard work that goes into building community. Along the way, we realized something interesting—communities were more interested in what they could be doing instead of just talking about what has been done. This led us to think about a bigger question—what makes communities great?

For a few years, I have followed the work of pioneering psychologist and best-selling author, Angela Duckworth. Her research focuses on answering the question of why some people succeed and

others fail. Duckworth has found that grit—that combination of passion and perseverance for a singularly important goal—is the hallmark of high achievers in every situation.

The grit theory seems to be a good way to understand what drives defense communities. Great defense communities have a singular goal—to support our military and their passion is unequal. We also know that there isn't one path to greatness and that every community has to define their own approach. But these different paths are built on similar ideas and approaches that everyone can use.

In this issue of *America's Defense Communities* magazine we share stories of grit, like Bay County, Florida's fight to rebuild after a devastating hurricane or the unique approach of New York's

North Country in using music to aid the challenges of transitioning from service. In this issue, we are proud to feature stories from more than 30 communities and states for a total of more than 50 ideas your community can use to enhance quality of life.

This issue also marks an exciting new direction for ADC's focus on quality of life. Thanks to support from USAA, we will be bringing together all of our work around great communities to build a best practices community on our website later this year.

In the meantime, we want to hear from you. What makes your community great? Share your stories at greatideas@defensecommunities.org and be part of making sure every defense community is a great place for our military to call home. 🇺🇸

PUBLISHED BY



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 and installation management to enhance 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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GREAT IDEAS!

America's Defense Communities put out the call for great ideas, and communities answered.

Throughout the magazine, you'll discover programs, projects and ideas of all sizes that are improving quality of life for service members and military families.

Great ideas are out there, and it's time to share them.



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The Last Word



Left to right: Sen. Inhofe (R-Okla.) meets Sr. Airman Rachone Kragel of the 138th Logistics Readiness Squadron in Tulsa, Okla. in August 2018. U.S. National Guard photo by Staff Sgt. Rebecca R. Imwalle; The 2018 Naval Postgraduate School summer STEM interns join NPS President Adm. Ronald Route (ret.), Provost Steven Lerman, Navy Chief of Staff Capt. Mike Ward, Dean of Research Jeffrey Paduan and STEM Internship Coordinator Alison Kerr. Photo by Naval Postgraduate School (NPS); Baron Davis, Richland Two superintendent, speaks at a Community Education Summit March 9, 2019. Photo by Fort Jackson

On the cover: A young boy celebrates a homecoming at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Wash. Photo by Kara Chappell Photography

Community Snapshots

America's Defense Communities looks back at some of the moments that caught our eyes over the past year.





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1 Maj. Gen. Randy Taylor, Senior Commander, Aberdeen Proving Ground, waves to the crowd at the 2018 Defense Communities National Summit. Photo by Will Noonan
 2 Maj. Gen. James Jacobson, commander of Air Force District of Washington and the 320th Air Expeditionary Wing, throws the first pitch. U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Michael Murphy 3 Robert McMahon, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Sustainment, speaks at a gathering in Macon, Ga., April 5, 2019. Photo by Tommie Horton 4 Second Lady Karen Pence greets Maj. Gen. Brian McKiernan and Theresa LaCamera, a senior spouse of the Fort Bragg command team during a visit to Fort Bragg, N.C. U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Dustin Biven. 5 Actress Brie Larson poses with Brig. Gen. Jeannie Leavitt in Washington. When Leavitt was the 57th Wing Commander at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Larson visited the base to research her character for the film *Captain Marvel*. U.S. Air Force photo by 2nd Lt. Jessica Cicchetto 6 Team Eglin members take the Polar Bear Plunge into Choctawhatchee Bay Jan. 18, 2019, at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla. U.S. Air Force photo by Samuel King Jr. 7 Fort Knox Regional Development Authority President and CEO Jim Iacocca, right, stands with the delegation from Fort Knox, Ky., at the 2018 Defense Communities National Summit. Photo by Will Noonan 8 Logistics Specialist 2nd Class Tre Francisco from Suffolk, Va., greets his wife and meets his newborn son for the first time upon returning from deployment in San Diego Mar. 1, 2019. U.S. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Jesse Monford 9 23rd Wing Commander Col. Jennifer Short tosses candy during a Moody Air Force Base, Ga., tree lighting ceremony, Nov. 30, 2018. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Erick Requadt



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From the high plains of New Mexico to the northern frontier of New York, the communities of the 2019 Class of Great American Defense Communities are redefining what it means to support an installation each and every day.

These five regions join the ever-growing list of Great American Defense Communities. To get your area on the map, check defensecommunities.org.



Great American Defense Communities



Key
Class of 2019

Leading the Charge

They may be from different parties, but the chairmen of the Senate and House Armed Services committees have both prioritized quality of life as an important part of readiness. *America's Defense Communities* asked **Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.)** and **Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.)** the same questions about how Congress supports military families.

SEN. JIM INHOFE

Sen. Inhofe has a long history of public service, including service in the U.S. Army and representing Oklahoma in the Senate since 1994. He became Senate Armed Services Committee chairman in September 2018.

ADC: As chairman, you have the unique opportunity to engage with service members and their families across the world. From these interactions, what do you see as the biggest challenge to the quality of life for our military families?

Inhofe: Military families face many challenges—access to child care, military spouse employment and access to health care, to name a few. They face these challenges, in most cases, far away from their families back home. Too often, families feel isolated and

unsure of where to turn when they have a problem. That is why it is so important for Congress to support military families by providing the best quality of life programs available. I am committed to continuing the commissary and exchange benefit, expanding child care availability on military installations, breaking down barriers to spouse employment and ensuring that families can get the right health care at the right time in the right place. I think you can see that in the work we are doing on the Senate Armed Services Committee. We ask so much of our military families—namely, constant relocations to faraway places and long absences from their loved ones. We need to show our gratitude for their service to the nation by making their lives better everywhere they serve.

ADC: What are your three priorities as it relates to military family quality of life?

Inhofe: You recruit the service member, but you retain the family. My priorities all come back to making sure military families know that they have an advocate in Congress for any issues they may face. Right now, I am leading the charge to improve the privatized military housing initiatives. We are taking a deep look into what happened that allowed conditions to deteriorate and how we can move forward to ensure military families live in safe, high-quality housing. In the next few months, I will also be working on cutting down the barriers for military spouse employment by advancing legislation to reduce the burden on military spouses when they must transfer a professional license or credential each time they move to another state. States across the country have varying requirements and tests for licensure, making it even more challenging for military spouses to find meaningful employment after relocation. Finally, I will continue my commitment to protecting and improving benefits for military families, specifically the commissary benefit and timely access to health care, and eventually helping them seamlessly transition into civilian life.

ADC: Quality of life for military families depends on the collaboration of state and local government and a variety of community organizations. Are there programs or organizations that serve as good examples of how collaboration can support military family quality of life?

Inhofe: Oklahoma is truly unique because we are one of the most military-

friendly states in the country. I attribute that to efforts from state and local government, as well as the private sector, to be welcoming and supportive of the families that support our five military installations. I see our integration of community resources as a model for other states to promote a supportive environment for our military families.



Sen. Inhofe greets veterans from the Oklahoma Honor Flight during their visit to Washington in April 2017. Photo submitted by the Office of Senator Jim Inhofe

REP. ADAM SMITH

Now in his 12th term in Congress, Rep. Smith was once the youngest state senator in the country, serving in the Washington State Senate at the age of 25. He became chairman of the House Armed Services Committee in January 2019.

ADC: As chairman, you have the unique opportunity to engage with service members and their families across the world. From these interactions, what do you see as the biggest challenge to the quality of life for our military families?

Smith: It varies and often depends who you ask—which service they're tied to, their assigned duty location, whether they are single or married, with or without children, etc. Military personnel concerns range from access to affordable child care services, to the quality of the schools their children attend as well as quality housing, spouse employment, and in some cases, comparable wage earnings to provide for


their families. We take seriously our role to provide oversight of the department's programs that affect the quality of life for military members and their families. When families are taken care of, our servicemembers can focus on the task at hand—to protect our nation's security interests at home and abroad.

ADC: What are your priorities as it relates to military family quality of life?

Smith: Military families are the backbone of a military member's service. A member's decision to stay in the military or leave, is weighed by the entire family; the services they are provided—and that Congress helps

protect—are factors into their decision-making process. All of these services are important, but we do prioritize our focus on military family housing, the unemployment and underemployment of military spouses, safe and accessible child care centers and ensuring adequate compensation and benefits for all services but particularly as they relate to our younger, lower-ranking enlisted service members.

ADC: Quality of life for military families depends on the collaboration of state and local government and a variety of community organizations. Are there programs or organizations that serve as good examples of how collaboration can support military family quality of life?

Smith: King County Veterans Consortium (KCVC) is a great example of collaboration between city, county and state partners. KCVC convenes diverse groups of service organizations that support veterans and their families. 



Rep. Smith shakes hands with Marine Corps Gen. Thomas Waldhauser before the start of the House Armed Services Committee hearing on Capitol Hill.
Photo by Associated Press



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A photograph of a person's hand raised in a crowd, with traffic lights and trees in the background. The image is partially obscured by a dark blue diagonal shape that contains the text.

How to **CELEBRATE** Your Community

Great Ideas for Recognizing Military Families and Veterans

A Fort Drum USO worker walks in the region's Armed Forces Day parade May 11, 2019. U.S. Army photo



These regions are rolling out the red carpet to pay tribute to service members, military families and veterans in their community. Whether it is a parade or an NFL game, part of being a defense community is celebrating what makes each community unique and the special mission they have.



James Deneen, a Vietnam veteran in Kentucky, studies the memorial, which opened to the public in April 2018. Photo submitted

Making a Visiting Memorial Permanent Greater Fort Knox Region, Ky.

“We know what a moving experience the national [Vietnam War] memorial in Washington has been, but not everyone has the means to travel there to see it,” retired Brig. Gen. Jim Iacocca said.

After the traveling version of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall rolled through the Fort Knox, Ky., area, the community decided the visit just wasn’t enough.

“In true fashion, this community decided it would quite literally bring the monument to our region’s Vietnam veterans,” said Iacocca, president and CEO of the Knox Regional Development Authority.

The community raised more than \$600,000 to install a permanent 80% scale replica of the original. The memorial opened to the public in April of 2018 and draws Vietnam veterans from nearby states, he said.

The region was a 2018 Great American Defense Community.

Delivering VIP Experiences Dayton Region, Ohio

The Dayton Development Coalition's Hometown Heroes program in Ohio is a year-round community appreciation program celebrating the contributions of those stationed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Springfield Air National Guard Base.

Inaugurated in 2004 and supported by the generosity of local businesses and sponsors, the Hometown Heroes program has provided more than 63,000 complimentary sports and entertainment tickets to airmen, their families and DOD civilians for a VIP experience at local events. Tickets include admission to performing arts venues, the Dayton Art Institute, outdoor concerts, NCAA March Madness basketball games and Dayton Dragons minor league baseball games.

Airmen and veterans are publicly recognized at the events and in sponsorship ads, radio spots and other media promotions.

(Below) Airmen from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and Springfield Air National Guard Base carry the U.S. flag onto the court during the NCAA First Four basketball tournament at the University of Dayton Arena. Photo submitted



Salute to Service, NFL-Style Tampa Bay, Fla.

Tampa Bay's beloved Buccaneers take part in the NFL's Salute to Service program, a year-round effort to honor, empower and connect with servicemembers, veterans and their families. In November 2018, to celebrate Veterans Day, Tampa Bay touted its 2018 recognition as a Great American Defense Community during halftime at the annual Salute to Service game.

More than 200 military members and their families enjoyed the game from exclusive seats at Raymond James Stadium, including a pre-game flyover and MacDill Air Force Base airmen leading the Bucs out of the tunnel.

(Above) Leaders from MacDill Air Force Base, USAA, ADC and the Buccaneers celebrate the 2018 Great American Defense Community recognition Nov. 11, 2018. Photo by Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce





Staff Sgt. Mahoney with her children Jamie (12), Caden (11) and Lacey (5) on the first day of their new school year. Photo submitted

Stronger Than Ever

Community leaders, servicemembers and residents in Bay County, Fla., are determined to rebuild their community better than ever, and celebrate the successes in between.

By Grace Marvin

Bay County's District 5 Commissioner Philip Griffiths remembers the day as a blur.

"It looked like a bomb went off. Our community had never experienced anything quite like this. This was something we'd never anticipated nor could have expected," Griffiths said.

For Griffiths, a third-generation Bay County resident, the destruction was hard to fathom. "This was something that the U.S. has only faced a couple of times in its history."

Hurricane Michael hit the Florida panhandle Oct. 10, 2018. Though the region is no stranger to hurricanes and tropical storms, Bay County was no match for the Category 5 storm. Much of the catastrophic



The Great American Defense Community logo is painted on the water tower at Tyndall Air Force Base. U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Javier Alvarez

 **Learn more about Bay County's comeback story at defensecommunities.org**

damage was due to extreme winds and storm surge.

Panama City Manager Mark McQueen had only been in the job for two weeks when Hurricane Michael hit.

"We had about 90% of all homes and businesses damaged or destroyed," said McQueen. "We found ourselves in a total blackout. Power, water, sewer and communications were 100% destroyed. It was a very precarious situation."

The storm rocked the military community, changing the lives of hundreds of servicemembers stationed at Tyndall Air Force Base and Naval Support Activity Panama City. The storm caused a devastating amount of destruction on Tyndall.

Staff Sgt. Stephanie Mahoney, an Airman Leadership School Instructor stationed at Tyndall since November 2010 lived in base housing and lost her home during Hurricane Michael.

"We walked inside and that's when I found out that multiple windows had blown in. There was a lot of water damage. It was very heartbreaking to see," Mahoney said. "The place that we called home, the place I had made a home for my children, it was literally ripped apart."

She struggled for months to find a permanent home for herself and her children. On Jan. 21, months after her home was destroyed, she moved her family into a new home.

"I sat down with a calendar and started counting the days. I got up to 105, and it just kind of blew my mind that for 105 days I didn't have an address to mail things to," she said.

Resilience has defined Bay County's path forward.


Mahoney called upon the curriculum she taught to help get her through the hard times.

"One of the lesson concepts we teach early on is warrior ethos. Warrior ethos means hardiness of spirit, that no matter how hard times are you have to stay tough, you have to keep going," Mahoney said. "That is what I have seen our servicemembers do, and it's what our community has done."

In the days following the storm, McQueen remembers neighbors helping neighbors and an outpouring of support, which he sees as a testament of the community's strength.

"We saw unbelievable outreach of people helping each other dig out from their current situations," McQueen said. "It was military helping civilians, civilians helping military."

McQueen said Panama City's future is bright.

"We may find that at the end of the day, after all this is said and done, we'll look back and see that the event of the hurricane was actually a blessing. It has motivated people to make our community better and stronger." 



Saddle Up

Staff Sgt. Bert Mantilla, 30th Security Forces Squadron conservation patrolman, puts a halter on a military working horse trooper at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., in February 2019. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Hanah Abercrombie



BAY COUNTY: RECOVERING FROM HURRICANE MICHAEL, TOGETHER.

Bay County, Florida, proud home to Tyndall Air Force Base and Naval Support Activity-Panama City, is celebrating recognition and success on a national level as being designated a 2019 Great American Defense Community. Bay County truly works at creating welcoming and supportive spaces for service members and their families to live and thrive through our Military Affairs Committee since 1946. Today, following Hurricane Michael, that partnership continues to strengthen as our community works together to recover and build a better Bay County. Thank you Association of Defense Communities for recognizing our community's unified support, strength and resiliency while supporting our installations and military residents.



Learn more about our community at PanamaCity.org.



Making a Difference for Kids

Great Ideas to Support our Military Youth

Adela Zamora, an intern from Hartnell Community College, tests her LEGO Mindstorm for balance as part of a summer 2016 project at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, Calif. Photo by NPS



There are currently about 2 million military-connected children in America. With military families moving every two to three years, more than 500,000 children are changing schools every year. It's a tough pattern on kids and a big worry for families. Communities are helping ease the transition with programs that embrace new students and are creating opportunities for non-military kids to benefit from their communities' defense ties.



Photo submitted

Recognizing Kindness in the Classroom Southeastern Connecticut

A program in Groton, Conn., recognizes students that excel in the areas of behavior, attitude, kindness, helpfulness and support towards others. Groton Recognizes Our Children's Kindness and Safety ("Groton Rocks"), aims to encourage students in kindergarten through fifth grade to value kind behavior. Nominated by staff at their school, students are honored with certificates and a special lunch with community leaders. Sailors from Naval Submarine Base New London and other public officials take part in the program's recognition activities at local schools.

Ensuring Great Libraries for Everyone Sierra Vista, Ariz.

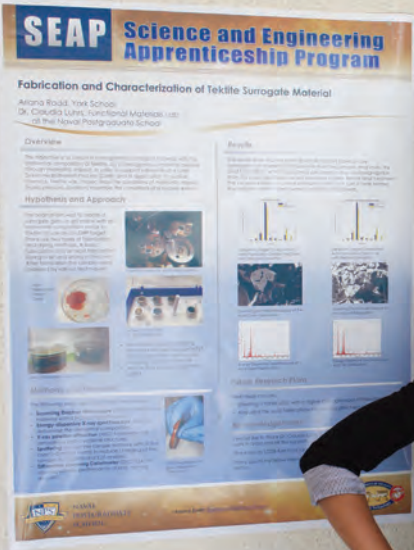
When the base library on Fort Huachuca closed in 2007, the city of Sierra Vista, Ariz., wasted no time in establishing a ground-breaking partnership to share the city library with the base.

The Sierra Vista Public Library is now the sole provider of library services to the region's soldiers and their families. Each year the library engages military families in new ways to ensure the base's literary needs are being met.

Quarterly, library staff attends the Fort Huachuca orientation program for newly assigned families and offer free library card sign-ups and conduct outreach to spread the word about the library's story time program and educational classes.



As part of its partnership, the library ensures its collection has the books on the base's specified reading lists. Photo submitted



SEAP intern Ariana Rodd and her mentor Dr. Claudia Luhrs show off their summer's research at the NPS STEM Internship Research Showcase. Photo submitted

Students Learn STEM in the Navy's Classrooms Monterey, Calif.

The impact of the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) program at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS) in Monterey, Calif., ripples far beyond the research institute's fence line.

When NPS's first class of four STEM interns arrived on campus in 2007, coordinator Alison Kerr had no idea the program would grow to graduate more than 600 students in just 12 years.

"What is unique about the program is that we are the Navy's higher education institution," said Kerr, who has coordinated the institute's STEM summer internship program since the first class of students. "In addition to being researchers, [the faculty] are also educators."

With several educational and research opportunities available, every student's experience is unique.

"My responsibilities depend on what is going on in the lab, how far along the research study is, whether there are new projects or studies beginning that day," said Katie Mortimore, a 2018 intern in the Science and Engineering Apprenticeship Program (SEAP). "Some days are similar, but every day is different."

In addition to participating in SEAP and Naval Research Enterprise Internship Program (NREIP), NPS partners with California State University, Monterey Bay, community colleges and high schools, making the program available to a wide variety of students in Monterey, Salinas and surrounding cities.

"We started with a small group of students from Hartnell College in Salinas. The students are often first-generation Americans, first-generation college-goers," Kerr said.

The impact of having an award-winning STEM program at the institute extends beyond the educational opportunity.

"This program reaches out into the community. There is a richness that comes from having the students on campus for eight weeks in the summer," Kerr said. "The students infuse enthusiasm on campus. It's a win-win for everyone."



Participants of the 2019 Fort Hood area Lemonade Day pose next to their lemonade stand. Photo submitted

Investing in the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs Fort Hood-Central Texas

Military kids living on base at Fort Hood, Texas, are learning how to start, own and operate their own business through a program called Lemonade Day.

The lesson-based program teaches the basics of entrepreneurship, and the curriculum culminates with the youth operating their own stand in a community-wide Lemonade Day event. The program instills the principle of "spend a little, save a little, give a little," and participants learn business skills, responsibility, financial literacy, goal-setting and teamwork.

"Adaptability and creativity are qualities our military kid participants have because of the way they have grown up," said Amanda Sequeira, the city director for Lemonade Day Fort Hood Area. "Those traits align with the principles Lemonade Day teaches."

As Fort Hood area sponsors recognized how life-changing the experience was for their military children, they sought to collaborate with Lemonade Day to launch the program in more defense communities across the nation. WinnCompanies and Lendlease have since launched the program at three other military bases and may expand to additional sites.



FOCUSING ON FIRST★DAY FEARS

By Willona Sloan

Being the new kid is always hard. For children arriving at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C., a youth program can help alleviate some of the first-day jitters.

Before they even arrive at the installation, new students can be connected to student volunteers through the Fort Jackson Student Ambassador program and gain a friend who can help them navigate life in the new school, neighborhood and community.

“The Student Ambassador Program was designed to address a concern that we consistently hear from our military families: the stress transitions put on their children,” said Col. Joseph McLamb, deputy commanding officer, U.S. Army Training Center. “This concern is not unique to Fort Jackson, but local conditions can affect the intensity of stress associated with transitions.”

For parents, too, the added stress of worrying whether their kids will find



(Above) Brig. Gen. Milford Beagle, Jr., speaks to a PE class about nutrition and exercise at Pinckney Elementary School. Photo by Fort Jackson

(Left) Fort Jackson Commander Brig. Gen. Milford H. Beagle, Jr., speaks to military students who are on the local hockey team in the midlands. Photo by Fort Jackson

friends can make the move to a new installation even more difficult, Sunny Bolton, coordinator of Fort Jackson child and youth services, said. Parents can feel relieved that their children won't be alone.

The program also serves graduating 6th grade students who attend Department of Defense Education Activity schools and then must transition to one of the off-post middle schools. As students attending school on the installation matriculate through sixth grade, they miss the first year of middle school, which in the local school district runs from sixth through eighth grade. Through the Student Ambassador program, students can spend a day as an honorary seventh grader. They can do a school walkthrough, meet administrators, teachers, and other

students, and get a sense of what the middle school experience will hold.

"We have realized that the [richer] the program is, as far as real experiences, the better," school liaison officer Fred Henley said. "Giving them an experience like that is very fruitful."

Henley agrees that the services the Student Ambassador program provides can help put parents' minds at ease, allowing them to do their jobs.

"The soldiers go through basic training here," he said. "We need their minds to be focused on the mission. With programs like this it helps them to be assured that their children are being taken care of."

The Student Ambassadors program was created after an Education Summit, spearheaded by Nanette Pigg, school program manager at Installation Management Command, and held in partnership with the Columbia Chamber of Commerce and local school district.

"We had everybody from the community come in, and we came up with a game plan for things that we needed to do a little better job with, school liaison

officer Gary Williams said. "One of those things was enabling effective transition for military students."

Fort Jackson's leadership has developed several education-focused goals, including re-establishing effective lines of communication between families and the school district, providing families with timely information about educational opportunities available to their children, and strengthening ties between the school district and the installation, McLamb said.

The work has paid off. "The partnership Richland Two shares with Fort Jackson is highly regarded and well-respected," said Baron R. Davis, Richland School District Two superintendent. "It becomes that much more meaningful when the top brass makes what educators do every day a top priority for the military as we work together to provide the best education possible for students."

The Student Ambassador program serves as an important step towards making military-connected students more successful both on the installation and in the larger community. 📌

Flying High

Jerril Eisenbeck entertains his son Troy at the annual Armed Forces Day celebration at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., in May 2018.
U.S. Army photo by Joint Base Lewis-McChord Public Affairs Office



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SERVICE

The REAL SOUTHERN HOT SPOT

As home to Fort Jackson and as one of the most military-friendly communities around, you could say that dedication to service just comes naturally to us. But we know it takes hard work. Our hats are off to the men and women responsible for Columbia SC being selected as a Great American Defense Community by the Association of Defense Communities. And if you want to come help us celebrate, we have just the right mix of family-friendly attractions, heaping helpings of Southern food and plenty of good old-fashioned kindness waiting for you. Visit ExperienceColumbiaSC.com



A person in a military uniform is shown from the chest up, looking out over a parking lot. The background is slightly blurred, showing several cars and green trees under a clear sky. The image is split diagonally by a dark blue shape that contains the main text.

PUTTING FAMILIES FIRST

Innovative Ideas to Create Great Places for Families

Cpl. Keisuke Gonzales returns from a six-month deployment in Eastern Europe and embraces his baby daughter during a homecoming ceremony at Camp Lejeune, N.C. U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Cpl. Shannon



Military service can be tough on families. Frequent relocation often results in spouse underemployment, child care concerns and other transition issues. Families miss their loved ones and may face financial burdens to visit their home for holidays or special occasions. Great defense communities play an important role in ensuring service member and family needs are met. From creating resource networks to opening doors to education for spouses, here are five great ideas to support military-connected families.

Resource Kits Provide Connections South Puget Sound, Wash.

A pilot partnership is distributing Care to Connect Kits to connect service members at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., and local veterans to available health care, education, social services, transportation and other services. The program is a partnership between the city of Lakewood and the South Sound Military Communities Partnership.

The Care to Connect Kit program distributed nearly 200 kits in the past year, all with personal connections. The Connect Kits contain key items like phone numbers and website addresses to empower recipients to reach locally available assistance, ideally within walking distance. Other kit contents include small amounts of food and water, phone cards, a travel blanket and items to de-stress.

The staff distributing the kits are trained by Mental Health First Aid or a similar program, with additional training specifically on Connect Kits.

Any organization can use the Connect Kit sample to customize a kit for service members and veterans in their communities.

Improving Air Service and Access Fort Leonard Wood Region, Mo.

The U.S. Army Maneuver Support Center of Excellence at Fort Leonard Wood trains more than 86,000 military personnel and civilians each year. Service members and their families now have a streamlined way of traveling to and from the installation thanks to the recent securement of a larger commercial jet service at the region's joint use airport located at Fort Leonard Wood.

The new commercial jet service commenced on February 12, 2019 and serves as a much-needed transportation solution. The nearest airport, the St. Louis Airport, clocks in at two hours of travel time.

Waynesville St. Robert Regional Airport is one of the few joint use airports in the U.S. Army, and the service will alleviate the need to bus soldiers to and from the St. Louis Airport, as well as ease travel plans during the holiday season.

The effort was spearheaded by the Waynesville St. Robert Regional Airport board.

Contour 30-seat jets now serve the region at the Waynesville/St. Robert Airport. Photo by Marti Yoshida





Employment Empowerment for Military Spouses Colorado Springs, Colo.

Colorado Springs, Colo., is home to the Military Spouse Career Coalition (MSCC), a nonprofit organization creating a model community where employers actively recruit, hire and promote military spouses.

The MSCC is comprised of military, business and spouse representatives who have joined together to train, educate, inform and empower military spouses in the workforce and breaking down legislative barriers to military spouse employment. As part of its charter, it offers free career events.

MSCC goals include spotlighting local, state and national career resources; educating employers on the value of hiring military spouses; and tracking and supporting state and federal efforts, including inter-state licensing and certification reciprocity.

(Above) Lindsay Teplesky speaks at the January 2019 meeting of the Military Spouse Career Coalition. Photo submitted



Connecting Military Families to Services Alamo-San Antonio Region, Texas

TXServes—San Antonio is committed not only to providing first-rate support for its large service member and veteran community but also to offering easy access to an array of services for military families who often encounter unique issues related to the military lifestyle. It is a local branch of AmericaServes, the nation's first coordinated network of public, private and nonprofit organizations providing military-related support services.

The program has expanded its trouble-free access to a network of providers for veterans, their families and active duty military families, to enroll for support services through a single eligibility verification system. That allows them to access a range of support services, including legal guidance, housing, employment, medical, financial, education and transportation.

(Above) A member addresses the audience during the launch of Texas's 9th branch TXServes-San Antonio. Photo submitted



ANGEL ARMS

By Haley Shapley

In 2011, Clovis, N.M., native Esther Steinle was reading a novel that gave her the idea to send home a service member for the holidays. Her friends liked what she was doing, and that Christmas, eight couples got together to cover the plane trip to New Jersey for a young airman who missed the previous two holiday seasons with his family.

December passed, and her good deed was complete, but Steinle felt there was more she could do. “After Christmas was over, the thought wouldn’t leave my mind,” she said.

That’s when she decided she would do the same thing in 2012—and go even bigger. She called the program Angel Arms and started working with Cannon Air Force Base to identify airmen who otherwise would not be able to travel home for the holidays.

The goal that first year was to raise \$3,000 and send six people home. Instead, Angel Arms raised \$11,000 and sent 22 service members home. Since its inception, the organization has helped more than 180 military members visit their families.

Senior Airman Valesia Williams, who hadn’t been back home to Virginia in more than a year and a half, was one of the award recipients in 2018. For Williams, it was particularly meaningful to spend quality time with her loved ones, as she was just months away from changing duty stations to Korea.

“It was a good opportunity for me to be able to go home, see everyone before I leave, and celebrate my birthday with my parents, family and friends,” Williams said. “It was amazing. I didn’t think I would get the opportunity to do it.”



(Left) MC-130J Commando II's from the 522nd Special Operations Squadron at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M. conduct low level formation training over Clovis, NM. U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Plew

(Below) A1C Tyler Marin, an Angel Arms recipient, visits with his parents during the holiday season. Photo submitted



Helps Young Airmen Travel to See Their Families

Angel Arms has sent airmen all over the continental U.S. and to farther-flung locations such as Africa, Guam, the Philippines and St. Thomas. Once they've all returned to duty in New Mexico, there's a reception every January that brings together airmen, their first sergeants, and the donors.

"It's fun to hear their stories about their trips home and what it's meant for them," Steinle said. "Sometimes there's a really good reason for them to go home."

In one case, a young man traveled to see his family and had been back for less than a week when he got a call that his brother had been killed in a burglary. In another, it was an airman's last chance to see an aging grandmother.

"It's heartwarming to know that there's always a reason why they're on the list and you just don't know it until afterward," Steinle said.

Angel Arms always raises as much as it needs in any given year, and so far, everyone whose name has been submitted has been able to get assistance. Donors are a mixture of individuals, businesses and organizations, many of whom Steinle said give year after year. She hopes to see the program extend to other communities.

For the airmen who get an opportunity to travel, Angel Arms brings tidings of comfort and joy at a special time of the year.

"Especially as younger airmen, going home during the holidays isn't something that happens very often," Williams said. "It's really an experience I'll probably never forget." 🍷

Airman Brandon Chan is greeted by his sister at the airport. Chan was able to return home for the holidays thanks to financial support from Angel Arms. Photo submitted





Pick Me!

Col. Bryan White, 168th Wing Commander, Alaska Air National Guard, speaks to a kindergarten class in Fairbanks, Alaska on May 10, 2019 at Weller Elementary School. U.S. Air National Guard photo by Senior Airman Mae S. Frazier

Celebrating

Clovis, New Mexico

a truly Great American Defense Community



An All Star community located on the High Plains of eastern New Mexico in the Land of Enchantment, Clovis serves as a national model for military-community collaboration, mutual support and opportunity.

For more than 60 years Clovis' priority has been to support Cannon AFB's Airmen and their families, based on a broad range of efforts and activities Clovis spearheads and supports to ensure their time at Cannon is an outstanding experience.



In 2019 Clovis is honored to be recognized for various military related programs provided and supported by individuals and organizations in the community, including Cannon Appreciation Day, the Nursing program at Clovis Community College, Angel Arms, Cannon Newcomer's Tour, and other Veterans' Support programs.

Clovis - A Community for Family



Home of Cannon Air Force Base



NAVIGATING the Military- Civilian Transition

How Defense Communities are Leading the Way

Military-affiliated students at University of South Carolina benefit from a large number of programs designed to support students who are veterans or active duty military personnel. Photo submitted



For most service member's transitioning out of the service, their transition often begins in the communities where they serve. Our defense communities are a landing pad, essential to making sure that life after service is successful. From preparing for a new career to finding comfort in creative pursuits, community partners have embraced this role, displaying a commitment to taking care of the people who take care of us.



Free Textbooks for Service Members Enid, Okla.

In Enid, Okla., the community surrounding Vance Air Force Base, a scholarship program not only funds college tuitions but pays for textbooks, too.

The Vance Scholarship Program was started in the mid-1990s and is funded by the city. Initially the program began as a solution to fully fund active duty airmen's tuition, paying for 25% of tuition costs the Air Force did not cover.

In 2012, the Air Force began paying 100% of tuition for active duty airmen, so the program was revamped to use the money to fund textbooks and provide scholarships to spouses and children. In 2018, \$45,000 in funding was provided for the scholarship program.

(Above) The Vance Scholarship Program provides tuition and textbook assistance for military spouses and children in addition to service members. Photo by Northern Oklahoma College

An All-in-One Tool for Navigating the Job Hunt Hampton Roads, Va.

In 2016, Hampton Roads-area leaders identified a need for a "one-stop center" to deliver a high-touch workforce development approach tailored to individuals' goals and grounded in an understanding of military culture and backgrounds.

The Hampton Roads Veterans Employment Center opened its doors Jan. 24, 2018, and has since served 1,455 customers, including active duty, reserve and civilian military personnel, military dependents, and veterans.

The center connects customers to employment and educational opportunities through work skills assessments, job search assistance, employment workshops, seminars and employer-specific hiring events.

The Hampton Roads Veterans Career Compass electronic portal, launched in January 2019, allows employers to post jobs and customers to access job opportunities—all specifically targeted to the military community.

From Soldiers to Students

Louisiana

The Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs website opens with the powerful headline, “We connect you with the benefits you earned.”

Recently, the department teamed up with the state’s higher education leaders to launch a program for student veterans and achieve the ambitious goal of opening 30 veteran resource centers on campuses across the state.

The centers, set to open in August 2019, will help students take full advantage of their state and federal benefits and also ease the overall transition from vet to college student.

Serving as a one-stop shop, each center will staff a trained LaVetCorps navigator who will mentor student veterans, connecting them with financial and housing resources and help them navigate program requirements.

These navigators also provide training and support to college faculty, staff and administration to increase awareness of student veterans’ needs and veteran culture, supporting the program’s objective of increasing retention and completion of degrees and licenses for veterans.

(Below) President of the Southern University System, Ray L. Belton, joins Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards and other higher education leaders in Feb. 2019 to express commitment to open 30 resource centers on campuses throughout the state. Photo by Southern University



For service members transitioning out of the military, taking off the uniform can leave them feeling unmoored and asking: “Who am I now, and what will I do with my life?”



The VECTR Center serves as a gateway for veterans' re-entry into Georgia's public post-secondary educational systems and workforce. Photo submitted by VECTR Center

OPENING DOORS TO CIVILIAN CAREERS

In Warner Robins, Ga., the newly opened Georgia Veterans Education Career Transition Resource (VECTR) Center provides separating service members the streamlined services, training, and support necessary to assist in preparing for a smooth transition and a productive post-military career.

“We offer accelerated training programs that allow not only our active duty military, but also veterans, to get in-demand workforce skills as quickly as possible so we can get them employed in household-sustaining wage jobs, and they can more easily make that transition once they take off the uniform,” said retired Air

Force Col. Patricia Ross, the center's chief operating officer.

As an administrative unit of Central Georgia Technical College, the VECTR Center provides intensive training and certification programs that include HVAC (Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning), Cisco networking, commercial truck driving, and welding and joining technology.

Partners include the state departments of Veterans Service and Labor, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and United Way/Mission United. They help VECTR provide workforce training, job skills, behavioral health services, homeless services and other important social services. The Center has strong corporate partners, including GEICO. Earlier this year, it received a \$100,000 grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies.

VECTR also provides a place to call home. "We knew that if we were going to reach people from some of our larger installations in Georgia, we needed to house them," Ross said.

They worked with the leadership at Robins Air Force Base to create an agreement allowing active duty soldiers transitioning out of the military to reside in a dorm during training.

Since 2016, VECTR has assisted more than 20,000 individuals with accessing VA benefits, employment, education, entrepreneurship training, certification testing and other benefits.

Ground will be broken on a Center expansion in the spring. It hopes to offer more housing opportunities through partnerships and introduce new training programs.

Darionte McCord

Darionte McCord, a culinary specialist in the Army, is currently participating in the welding program and living in VECTR's onsite housing. The program offers the opportunity to learn new skills and develop a new path.

"I discovered the VECTR Center and saw that they had a lot to offer," said McCord, who started with the program in January. "They provide you with everything you need and more, and they give you a nice place to stay."

For McCord, whose grandfather was a welder, learning a new trade that can



McCord takes part in a welding class exercise at the VECTR Center, which offers a variety of class schedules in an effort to provide flexibility to veterans and their families. Photo submitted by VECTR Center

provide a viable career excites him.

"Welding is something that I always wanted to learn how to do," he said. "It is such a broad trade. You can never learn everything in welding, because there is always something new to learn."

McCord has already recommended the program to fellow service members because of the quality of the training and the support he receives from the staff at VECTR. "It's hard to fail. Even if you wanted to," he said.

James Harris

After transitioning from the Army in 1996, James Harris bounced around for several years and eventually found himself to be homeless. "A lot more time had passed than I had thought trying to get back in step," Harris said recently.

While he was living in a Salvation Army-run homeless shelter in Macon last year, he learned about the VECTR Center. He participated in the intensive HVAC program, which packed about 18-months' worth of material into a three-month class.

"That was the first time in my life that I enjoyed school," said Harris, who liked being in class with other veterans. He also appreciated the respect and support he received from the VECTR Center staff. Within a year, his whole life had changed.

On Veterans Day in 2018, the GEICO regional office presented him with a car. "The reason [VECTR Center] wanted to get me a car was because you need a car to get a job," Harris said. "They wanted me to find housing, so they got me into a Section 8 program so that I could get housing. They also helped me to find a job."

For veterans, VECTR seeks to provide a "total solution," Harris said. For him, the Center delivered on that promise. 📌



Harris is recognized as the VECTR Center's first scholarship recipient. From left, Donna Hansen, Harris, retired Gen. Al Hansen, and VECTR COO, retired Col. Patricia Ross. Photo submitted by VECTR



NEW PERRY HOTEL, PERRY, GA.

Taste of the Peach State

Ask an airman who has been stationed at Robins Air Force Base what they remember most about Middle Georgia, and many will say “The Food.” Straight from the kitchen of the historic New Perry Hotel in Perry, Ga., Middle Georgia residents shared a flavor of the South with *America's Defense Communities*.

PEACH PAN PIE

3 cups firm fresh peaches, sliced
 ¼ cup water
 1 cup sugar
 ½ cup butter
 Pinch of flour
 2 pastry dough sheets

Bring water and sugar to a boil for a few seconds.

Add peaches and simmer while lining sides of a baking dish with one of the pastry sheets. Save the other pastry sheet for the top of the pie.

Lift peaches slices out of the water and layer in the dish. Dot peaches with butter and sprinkle with flour. Layer until all peaches are used. Cover the peaches with the second sheet of pastry. Make a slash in the center of the pastry to vent.

Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Pie serves 8.

Recipe adapted from the *Recipes from the New Perry Hotel* by Bobbee Nelson



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Building Quality of Life

How Defense Infrastructure Supports our Military Families

By Greg Traweek

Last year, Congress created the Defense Community Infrastructure Program, a game-changing authority that creates a DoD fund for supporting community infrastructure outside the gate. These investments will enhance the military value of bases and quality of life in communities.

The Defense Communities Infrastructure Program (DCIP) can aid communities by pooling state, local, private sector and even other federal investments for needed infrastructure improvements. DCIP was authorized in the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), but Congress has not yet funded it at its initial \$100 million level.

Fully funded, DCIP could result in an estimated \$300-\$400 million impact nationwide, creating a ready-to-go infrastructure plan that strengthens readiness and community quality of life.

America's Defense Communities talked with some key lawmakers about how infrastructure projects have changed their communities for the better and the potential impact of DCIP.

Rep. John Carter

Carter's (R-Texas) district includes Fort Hood. Carter is the ranking Republican on the military construction appropriations subcommittee.

"Years ago, I-195, which connects Killeen to the greater Austin area, was a historically dangerous highway known for fatal accidents. The route was so dangerous that a Fort Hood commander disallowed soldiers to travel on I-195. Finally, the road was widened and improved after fighting for decades. Not only was the road a military asset to increase efficient travel from Fort Hood to I-35, it saved soldiers' lives once construction was completed and improved traffic conditions for civilians.

Rep. Carter helps break ground for the final phase of an I-195 widening project in March 2015. Photo submitted



Sen. Jerry Moran

Moran (R-Kan.) serves on the defense appropriations subcommittee.

“The Kansas communities surrounding Fort Riley, Fort Leavenworth, Forbes Field and McConnell Air Force Base are known for welcoming our service members and their families with open arms. Many local communities support these installations by making improvements to infrastructure surrounding the base—such as improving roads, building new schools and hospitals, and completing other utility projects. Though these projects may be outside the gates of an installation, they have a direct impact on both base operations and quality of life for those who serve our nation.”

Sen. Moran visits Fort Riley.
Photo submitted



Rep. Derek Kilmer

Kilmer's (D-Wash.) 6th district includes Naval Station Kitsap and borders Joint Base Lewis-McChord. He serves on the defense appropriations subcommittee.

“Joint Base Lewis-McChord is right outside my district, but there are a lot of folks that commute every day from Washington’s 6th district to the base. To get there, they’ve got to make it down bumper-to-bumper traffic on I-5 and make their way along some of the few roads that lead to the base. DCIP could help fund improvements to these roads, specifically to a stretch of road leading to the east gate of the base. The city of Lakewood and Pierce County are ready to cover their shares of the costs to replace traffic signals with roundabouts, add sidewalks and proper curbs, and improve road drainage—but could sure use a little assistance from DCIP to bring this project across the finish line.”

Rep. Kilmer helps re-open the newly renovated Burwell Pedestrian Tunnel in September 2018. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Wyatt L. Anthony



Leading with Heart



Whether they are leading the charge in state government or DoD, shaping the future of a closed base, or changing the lives of students by bringing STEM education to local schools, the 2019 Defense Community Award honorees are a group of bold change-makers, driven by passion and a whole lot of heart.



DEFENSE COMMUNITY AWARDS



Houlemard, second from right, helps break ground at the Central Coast Veterans Cemetery in March 2015. The cemetery opened in October 2016. Photo submitted

JOHN LYNCH BASE REDEVELOPMENT LEADERSHIP AWARD

MICHAEL HOULEMARD, JR.

Executive Officer, Fort Ord Reuse Authority

Ford Ord, Calif., was one of the largest U.S. military bases to ever be shut down. It spanned 28,000 acres across three counties when it was closed Sept. 30, 1994. Since then, Michael Houlemard, Jr., Ford Ord Reuse Authority (FORA) executive officer, has led the planning, financing and implementation of the former base's redevelopment. His dedication has been a key driver in creating spaces and opportunities that will benefit the surrounding communities for years to come.

Today, the former base is home to a university, residential developments, a shopping district and a clinic that serves both veterans and active duty service members. Every weekend, you'll find local residents enjoying the beaches, hiking and biking the trails, and visiting Fort Ord National Monument, with some of its trails boasting panoramic views of Monterey Bay.

"When Fort Ord closed, I co-authored the legislation that sculpted a unique, multi-jurisdictional reuse authority to handle its reuse and redevelopment. The complicated management structure required a really skillful, multi-talented leader. We found that in Michael Houlemard. He gets results. The Fort Ord community of today is his legacy, and the community is grateful to him for his vision."

—Former U.S. Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.)

MILITARY LEADERSHIP AWARD

COL. MARC PACKLER

Commander, 375th Communications Group, Scott Air Force Base

Air Force Col. Marc Packler, commander of the 375th Communications Group at Scott Air Force Base, has catapulted the St. Clair County, Ill., region toward becoming a cybersecurity, and STEM education leader. Through partnerships with 22 area schools and universities, the Midwest Cyber Center, and the Leadership Council Southwestern Illinois, he has brought cyber education and career opportunities to more than 14,000 students. A strong proponent of intelligent infrastructure improvement, Col. Packler has spearheaded large-scale projects to renew, harden and robust outdated software, harnessing collaboration from across the U.S. to continuously improve infrastructure.

"Col. Packler's enthusiastic leadership has strengthened our cyber defense posture and educated the next generation of cyberspace warriors, all while developing the workforce at Scott Air Force Base through numerous community partnerships. These efforts have had a huge positive impact both on and off the base."

—Col. Joseph Meyer, 375th Air Mobility Wing and Installation Commander

Col. Packler speaks at a Veterans Day event in Belleville, Ill. U.S. Air Force photo by 375th Air Mobility Wing





STATE LEADERSHIP AWARD

KAY IVEY

Governor, State of Alabama

Known as a champion for Alabama's military installations and a steadfast supporter for men and women in uniform, Gov. Kay Ivey (R), has championed a variety of legislation to improve the lives of military members and their families since she assumed office in 2017.

In May of 2018, Gov. Ivey signed multiple bills into law aimed to enhance quality of life, including the Military Family Jobs Opportunity Act, which provides licensure reciprocity to military spouses across numerous state agencies and the Parks for Patriots Bill, which grants free state park admission to active or retired service members who are Alabama residents. Gov. Ivey was also an integral part of the effort to secure the F-35 mission for the 187th Fighter Wing at Maxwell Air Force Base.

Gov. Ivey recognizes soldiers at the 2018 Governor's Outstanding Service Member Awards Luncheon. During the event, Ivey signed the Military Family Jobs Opportunity Act. Photo by Hal Yeager

“While many people were involved in the multi-year selection process for the F-35 Fighter Wing, the governor led our state through this journey with distinction, and she was instrumental in bringing this next-generation aircraft to Montgomery. As her friend and colleague, I am incredibly proud of Gov. Ivey's leadership and commitment to Alabama's military footprint.”

—U.S. Rep. Martha Roby (R-Ala.)

DEFENSE COMMUNITY AWARDS

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD

MICHAEL COLEMAN

Military Relations Liaison, Commonwealth of Virginia Office of Veterans and Defense Affairs

Michael Coleman has played a key role in supporting and growing Virginia's 30 military installations and their associated activities during the past decade. As a result of his leadership, new intergovernmental service agreements have been signed at installations from all four services, including a new partnership between Fort Lee and neighboring Prince George County to help save lives by shortening response times of both installation and county police, fire and rescue units.

At the core of Coleman's leadership is a deep understanding of the value of each military installation, and the importance of developing partnerships that support the community and the installations.



Through all the various commonwealth military-community partnerships, there is one common thread: Mike Coleman. Mike's leadership has produced astounding results. He cares deeply about partnerships and the benefits they bring to the soldiers, sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, civilians and families serving in the commonwealth."

—Carlos Hopkins, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, Commonwealth of Virginia

Coleman, left, at Fort Lee in 2015. Photo submitted



Bolden speaks at the 2018 Army Community Partnership Award Ceremony in the Pentagon Hall of Heroes. Photo submitted

MILITARY LEADERSHIP AWARD

IVAN BOLDEN

Chief, Army Partnerships, U.S. Army

Ivan Bolden's active duty and civilian Army career has spanned 45 years—and today he continues to make a difference as a champion of Army community partnerships across the nation. Bolden has directly helped more than 25 Army installations and communities spearhead initiatives exceeding 250 partnership concepts and implement 34 intergovernmental support agreements.

A strong proponent of partnerships beyond base operations services, Bolden leverages academia, industry and business experts to solve challenges and encourages innovative partnerships that benefit both the military and defense communities.

To recognize exceptional partnering with state and local governments, Bolden created the annual Army Community Awards program, which to date has honored 14 Army installations and their local communities. The program promotes awareness of and encourages replication of successful partnerships across the Army and the nation.



Mr. Bolden has been a dedicated supporter of the military and defense communities through his distinguished active duty and civilian Army career that spans 45 years. The success we have achieved in the Fort Polk region with IGSA's are a direct result of the personal attention and confidence that he placed in our community partners. His actions and selfless desire to promote partnerships will have a permanent and lasting effect on building and sustaining our defense communities across the nation."

—Mike Reese, President, Fort Polk Progress



THE POWER OF SERVICE.

From the deepest reaches of the ocean to the farthest reaches of space, Hancock County's support for Department of Defense missions is continuous and comprehensive. Hancock County's John C. Stennis Space Center, Port Bienville, and Stennis International Airport (KHSa) host and support one of the largest military operations in the nation, serving the Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, and Navy.

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We Are All Defense Communities



By Bill Parry, President, ADC

We live in a world that likes to draw boundaries, dividing people around almost every issue and idea. One much-discussed division is the military-civilian divide—the idea that far too many Americans don’t understand our military and lack a connection to the sacrifice our service members and their families make.

You can debate the generality, but the facts are hard to ignore. Less than half of one percent of our nation serves in the military, and the vast majority of Americans have zero interaction with members of the military, which is also the single largest expenditure of their tax dollars. In a recent Blue Star Families survey, only 18% of military families believe the general public understands their sacrifices.

In defense communities, we are quick to say, “There is no divide here.” But that same survey showed that almost half of military families feel like they don’t belong in the local civilian community. These statistics may not reflect your community, but we can’t ignore that these divisions exist, even in the best of our defense communities.

There are many factors at play, including the all-volunteer force that has defined our military for decades and that our defense communities look much different today than when the military first arrived there. More families live farther from bases—

often for affordable housing and quality schools—the dynamics are changing in our communities. While the neighborhood right outside the fence may be more supportive than ever, the larger community an installation calls home may be less friendly or understanding.

Our definition of defense communities has to evolve if we are going to continue to lay claim to building and supporting the great places for our military. We can no longer hold onto a dated image of a defense community defined by what is across the fence line. We must be ready to embrace new supporters to join us on our mission.

At the same time, we must be ready to build more local awareness and engagement around the support our families need. Despite progress nationally that has changed the impact our communities and states have on the military, our model of support must evolve.

Closing the military-civilian divide begins with America’s defense communities and how we teach the rest of the country about creating great places for our military to call home. 🇺🇸



NAVIGATING FROM BARRACKS TO BOARDROOMS

Chris Stegmaier had already met his share of challenges when he began to consider an MBA. With more than 20 years of government service under his belt—including time in the Army and National Security Agency—Chris saw the University of South Carolina's program as an efficient way to turn his considerable project management experience into a thriving civilian career.

Chris Stegmaier
Senior Strategy Consultant
Accenture
Atlanta, GA
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