

## COMMUNITY CORNER

## Options, community gatherings help with stress-free holidays

By Col. Kevin Brown  
GARRISON COMMANDER

Servicemembers are often live hundreds, if not thousands, of miles away from their extended Families. During deployments, Families left at home might be wondering what do for the holidays. How do you make them special? And what kind of holiday options are out there for our single Soldiers?

Thanks to our great communities in the Central Flint Hills Region, there are several adopt-a-Soldier programs going on through the holidays. USO Fort Riley, the Manhattan Military Relations Committee and the Junction City/Geary County Military Affairs Council have partnered for their "Home Away from Home" program, which pairs Soldiers with Families in the area.

Community members wishing to enjoy the holidays with a servicemember, and servicemembers looking to enjoy



Col.  
Brown

at 757-709-3814

The deadline for the Thanksgiving Home Away from Home program was Nov. 13; however, there's still time to sign up for Christmas. The deadline for the Christmas program is Dec. 13. In Clay Center, Families looking to host single Soldiers for Thanksgiving should contact Mayor Sharon Brown at citymayor@claycenterks.com or 785-632-5454.

If you would like to get into the action, the Flint Hills Bread Basket in

good food and good company, can sign up by calling:

- Junction City/Geary County Military Affairs Council at 785-238-1270
- Manhattan Military Relations Committee at 785-776-8829
- USO Fort Riley

Manhattan is hosting its annual Thanksgiving dinner on Nov. 26 and is still in need of volunteers. Help is needed to deliver dinners to shut-ins; helping serve on the line or with dish washing or clean up. Call 785-537-0730 if you would like to help out. If you'd just like to eat Thanksgiving dinner without the work, anyone who doesn't have a place to spend Thanksgiving is welcome to attend the community dinner from noon to 2 p.m. at Tenth and Houston streets in Manhattan. No reservations are necessary.

If you would like to spend the holidays on post, get together with your friends and neighbors. Maybe the spouse next door whose husband is deployed doesn't have plans. Ask her over for Thanksgiving dinner. Get a group together and head to the dining facility.

The Devil's Den, Building 7011, and Cantigny DFAC, Building 7673, will serve both serve Thanksgiving dinner from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 26. If you're

craving turkey early, head to the Demon's Diner, Building 694, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 25 for a Thanksgiving spread.

Reach out to others this holiday season and let's make sure everyone has an enjoyable one. Here are some tips from Military One Source on other ways we can keep holiday stress to a minimum and enjoyment to a maximum:

• **Set realistic expectations.** Many of us set unrealistic expectations for ourselves as we prepare for holidays. We simply try to do too much. Ask yourself what you want the holiday to be or to mean. What is the most important part of the holiday for you? If sharing time with Family is most important, why not spend a day sledding with your children, and less time shopping for gifts or food?

If you are planning to serve a meal to Family members, why not say yes when others ask if they can bring something? Or, take responsibility for the main course and ask your guests to contribute the rest.

• **Prioritize.** Make a list of all the things you need to do, and decide which ones are the most important. Do the important things, and get to the rest if you have time. You may not be able to get to everything on the list, but if you get the important things out of the way, the rest probably won't matter.

• **Just say "no."** If you have a tendency to take on too much, learn to say no when people ask you to do just one more thing. Or maybe just find a few shortcuts if you can't resist saying yes. For example, you don't have to make all the cookies for the PTA party from scratch -- buy the cookie dough that comes in the tubes and bake it. Chances are, nobody will even notice.

• **Start new traditions.** Remember the meaning behind your traditions. It's often easy to let a tradition take on a life of its own and to forget what made the tradition important in the first place. Don't be afraid to start new traditions, if your Family has outgrown old ones.

• **Set a budget and stick to it.** Plan for an increase in spending if meals, gifts, and entertainment are part of the holiday. Know how much you can spend before you go shopping or before you decide how many people to invite for a holiday meal. This will keep you from spending more than you should. If you have a child who wants an expensive toy, it's OK to tell him that everyone has financial limitations. Save your money and use it to get a head start on planning for the following year.

• **Set differences aside.** Sometimes holidays throw Family members together who, at other times of the year, are happier apart. As you gather together with Family and friends, try to enjoy the feeling of togetherness, and save potentially heated discussion topics for another time. And remember, you can decide with whom you'll spend a holiday. A holiday gathering is about getting along

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## Home wanted

### Ellie

Ellie is an energetic hound mix that is about one year old. She has been at the stray facility for about a month. It is not known if she is spayed. She is very active, playful and gets along well with other dogs. Ellie would make a great addition to your Family.

Fort Riley Stray Facility also has several kittens that will be available for adoption on Nov. 23.

Fort Riley Stray Facility  
Building 226 Custer Ave., Main Post  
Hours: 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.,  
Monday through Friday (open to 4:30 p.m. on Wednesdays)  
Phone: 785-239-6183

## IN BRIEF

Teens are invited to the Middle School Teen Center from 8 to 10:30 p.m. Nov. 20 for a dance. Admission is \$1.50 for non-registered students and \$2.50 for non-registered students. Members may bring one paying non-member guest. Call 785-239-9222 for more information.

The Fort Riley Thrift Shop is open from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday and the first and third Saturdays of the month. Consignments will be from 9:30 a.m. until 1 p.m. The Dollar Bag Room will be open from 9:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

The Family Advocacy and Exceptional Family Member Programs will host their Family Holiday Conference from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Dec. 10 at Riley's Conference Center. During the educational and social training conference, Families will have the opportunity to interact and network. Santa will visit and lead holiday singing. Learn the hidden value of developing new Family traditions. RSVP by Nov. 23 to 785-239-9435.

Is your spouse deployed or preparing to deploy? Are you concerned about making parenting decisions while he or she is gone? Relocation Readiness and the K-State Research and Extension Office are holding a class to help parents brainstorm and develop creative ways to stay connected to their extended relocated Families over long distances. Learn how to deal with deployments and prepare for the changes ahead during the 2 to 4 p.m. class Dec. 10 at the Army Community Service Annex, Building 1020 Huebner Road. Call 785-239-9435 for more information.

**Child, Youth and School Services is hosting college preparation seminars to help parents and youth deal with school transitions successfully.** All classes are held in the CYSS conference room in Building 6620 at 7 p.m., unless otherwise noted, and are free. Call 785-239-9539 for more information.  
Jan. 10 – Financial Aid  
Jan. 21 – College Choices  
Feb. 18 – Prepare Yourself Financially for Leaving Home (ACS Annex)  
April 8 – Resume and College Essay Writing  
April 15 – School Transitions and Your Child  
May 13 – Job Interviewing

**The Club Beyond Chapel Youth Group meets from 5 to 6:30 p.m. on Sundays** in the basement of St. Mary's Chapel and from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday nights at the Middle School Teen Center. Middle and high-school aged youth off all denominations are invited to participate in games, enjoy snacks and learn Bible lessons. For more information, call Rick Hernandez, Club Beyond director, at 785-539-0312.

**The American Red Cross is now offering first aid and CPR online training at Fort Riley.** For more information on the online coursework and hands-on training, call 785-537-2180 or 785-238-3163.

**Normandy Chapel will host a new Bible study group at 6:30 p.m. Wednesdays.** Come explore the word of God in a relaxed and friendly environment. Soldiers and Families are welcome. Call 785-239-3359 for more information.

**High school students are invited for Bible Lunch Tuesdays,** aka B.L.T., every Tuesday during both lunch periods at Junction City High School. Students are picked up in the parking lot in front of the band room by various church vans and taken to the First Southern Baptist Church, 1220 West 8th St., for a free lunch and short devotional. If you have class on the southwest corner of JCHS or are in Deever it is a short walk. Several church youth groups, including Club Beyond, are involved in feeding more than 100 students each week. Come enjoy the free food (it beats the cafeteria), the fellowship (bring your friends and you won't have to worry about who you are going to sit with) and the faith stretching devotional by one of the local area youth ministers.

**Applications for the Fort Riley Thrift Shop's Eyes for Education program may be picked up** at all local schools, the Post Exchange Optical Shop, the Irwin Army Community Hospital Optometry Clinic and the thrift shop. Eyes for Education provides financial assistance toward eyeglasses for children. Several criteria must be met, but cases are considered on a case-by-case basis.

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Maj. Gen. Vincent K. Brooks, 1st Infantry Division and Fort Riley commanding general, commended the garrison on leading the program for another year and also recognized the new partners.

"These are organizations that are already filled with volunteers whose hearts of gold have no end," Brooks said. "They're now committing those great hearts, that endless well of goodness and love. They're committing it to this project as well."

Operation Santa is an opportunity to make a positive impact, Brooks said.

"If your heart says you want to be part of something good, come here," he said.

Operation Santa provides new toys to children who may not otherwise receive gifts during the holiday season. The program benefits children throughout the Central Flint Hills Region, including children in Fort Riley, Junction City and Manhattan.

Last year Operation Santa raised more than \$37,000 in cash and toy donations. About 3,600 children received gifts through the program.

"The continued success of this program relies solely on the generosity of the citizens of Fort Riley and our local communities," Mann said. "As you see,

the volunteers out in the community asking for donations, remember what they represent."

Donation drop boxes will be located in Junction City, Manhattan and Fort Riley.

Toys donated to Operation Santa should be new, unwrapped and age appropriate.

Gifts go to toddlers and older children, so people should remember both age groups when donating.

Operation Santa volunteers collect these gifts from the drop boxes, recruit help, wrap gifts and purchase more toys for the charity.

In the past, volunteers also would decide which toys to give to which children using request forms.

These gift request forms have been distributed to all unit first sergeants on post. They include the Family's name, ages of the children and any special needs the Family might have.

The request forms are due by Dec. 5 and can be faxed to 785-239-2797.

Turning them in by Dec. 5 allows for all orders to be filled and delivered before Christmas.

This year, a new addition to the program is parents will be allowed to pick out toys for their children at Operation Santa headquarters.

After they submit a request form to be part of Operation Santa, parents can call the headquarters to set up a shopping time.

The headquarters will be available for this purpose from 7 to 9 p.m. on Dec. 1-3 and from 2 to 5 p.m. on Dec. 5 and 6.

During this time, the headquarters will be closed to give the Families privacy.

If Families would prefer not to pick out the gifts themselves, Operation Santa volunteers will do so.

The volunteers will call the unit once the wrapped gifts are ready for pickup.

Any gifts left after the requests are filled will be donated to charity organizations in the area.

At the ribbon cutting, Brooks told attendees to remember the holiday season, though joyous, isn't a happy time for everyone.

"We hope that through Operation Santa, we can bring joy to places it might not have been otherwise," he said.

For a donation request form for your Family or someone you know, contact your unit first sergeant.

For more information on Operation Santa or to volunteer, call 785-239-6944, 785-239-2771 or e-mail riley.santa@conus.army.mil.

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with people to the best of your ability, not about putting yourself in anxious situations.

- **Be a kid again.** Take some time out of your preparations to play and just enjoy the scenery. Notice people's decorations. Take a nature walk, go skating, try some deep breathing exercises -- whatever helps you relax for awhile.
- **Get plenty of rest and exercise.** It's easy to forget to do the things that keep you healthy when you have so much to do. Keeping to your regular sleeping and exercise routines will give you the energy you need to do everything and it will keep some normalcy in your life.

- **Get emotional support.** If you're missing loved ones who have passed away or a Family member who can't be there to celebrate in person, make sure you reach out to friends or Family who can give you the emotional support you need. If your spouse is deployed, get together with others who are in your situation. Being with others who are experiencing similar feelings helps prevent loneliness.

- **Empathize.** Remember that other

people are also dealing with the stress and pressures of holidays. If you are in a traffic jam at the mall, you're one of many people trying to get everything done to make their celebrations run as smoothly as possible. Don't take the lack of parking spaces personally.

- **Remember that Families come in all shapes and sizes.** The picture-perfect Family presented in television ads, in magazines, and in stores is not a reality for many people. Yet some continue trying from year to year to capture a piece of that "perfect picture." Take a little

time to write down what you appreciate about the Family that you have and what your ideal Family holiday gathering would be. If you have always wanted that big Family but have only a few Family members living nearby, give yourself permission to expand your Family for the holiday to include other people who might be alone or who are separated from loved ones. (Source: militarysource.com)

*If you would like to comment on this article or suggest a topic for the Community Corner, e-mail riley.post.newspaper@conus.army.mil.*