

COMMUNITY CORNER

Post to kick off Operation Santa, opportunity to help those in need

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

Santa Claus will be making an early stop at Fort Riley Nov. 3 to help us kick off Operation Santa Claus.

Santa will join his volunteers to cut the ribbon on the Op Santa headquarters and officially begin the toy drive for this holiday season.

The ribbon cutting will be at 10:30 a.m. Nov. 3 at Building 261, Stuart Ave., on Main Post.

Operation Santa Claus is a local initiative put together to help provide toys for children in Families from Fort Riley, Junction City, Manhattan, and

throughout the Central Flint Hills Region, who might not otherwise have gifts for the holidays.

Last year, Operation Santa collected and donated about \$42,000 worth of presents for children.

After the official kick off, Operation Santa's volunteer elves will be recruiting help, wrapping gifts, collecting new unwrapped toys from drop boxes around the community and heading out on toy-buying drives.



Col. Brown

Besides those anonymous volunteers who left presents in drop boxes last year, more than 120 volunteers gave their time to fulfill Operation Santa's mission. This truly is an example of the Army taking care of its own.

This year, drop boxes for toys will be located at various points throughout Junction City, Manhattan and Fort Riley. We ask that toys be unwrapped and age-appropriate.

Operation Santa collects toys for children of all ages, so while you're out shopping, remember the older children, as well as the toddlers.

Those who would like to volunteer to gather toys or share their gift-wrapping skills

can call Sgt. 1st Class Bernadette Carr, Op Santa noncommissioned officer in charge, or Sgt. 1st Class Joseph VanHese, at 785-239-6944.

If you, or someone you know, could use help this holiday season, contact your unit first sergeant for a request form. Requests should include the Family's name, ages of children and any special needs and may be faxed to 785-239-2797.

Operation Santa gift request forms are being distributed this week to all unit first sergeants on post. Requests are due by Dec. 3 in order for all orders to be fulfilled and delivered before Christmas.

Any gifts left over after re-

quests are filled are donated to organizations within the Central Flint Hills Region.

One change to this year's program is parents will have the opportunity to come to Op Santa headquarters and pick out toys and stocking stuffers for their children.

In years past, volunteers would match gifts with request forms and deliver the toys wrapped for the holiday.

Parents may pick up toys from 2 to 7 p.m. Dec. 6 to 17 and from 2 to 7 p.m. Dec. 20 to 23.

After submitting a request form, Families should call Op Santa's headquarters to reserve a shopping time. The headquar-

ters will be closed to others during this time to allow our Families the privacy to shop.

If parents would rather have the elves pick out gifts, Operation Santa elves will call the unit once the wrapped presents are available for pick up.

Whether it is by volunteering or donating a gift, let's all do our part to support our Families who may be having tough times. By each giving a little, we can accomplish a lot this holiday season.

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

Paraplegic shares personal story, urges Army spouses to drive safe

By Katherine Rosario
1ST INF. DIV. POST

Kelly Narowski, a paraplegic, shared her story with the Resilient Spouse Academy Oct. 21 and warned them to think twice before answering their cell phone or texting while driving.

Narowski was 25 when her life in Santa Barbara, Calif., changed one afternoon while driving to a jazz festival on the beach.

She said she went over to her friend Heather's house before heading out to the beach.

"Heather had already had between six and eight drinks by the time I arrived," she said.

Though not a drinker, Kelly said she had two drinks before they headed out the door.

They drove down California State Road 1, commonly called Highway 1 — a scenic, curvy road which runs along the coastline of California.

Heather stopped the car and told Kelly she had to drive because she was too drunk.

She said she remembers running around from the passenger's side to the driver's side and hopping in the car.

"That was the last time I walked," she said.

Heather buckled herself in, but Kelly did not, and she started driving down the curvy

mountain road, deep in conversation with her friend.

When she turned the wheel to the right, the Jeep Wrangler went left and slammed into a guardrail once, pressing Kelly's body hard into the steering wheel and breaking her ribs, collarbone and collapsing her lungs, and a second time, sending her flying around inside the Jeep and into the backseat.

"I shattered my T6 vertebrae, and it exploded like a grenade, and my spinal cord was stretched like a piece of taffy. I was paralyzed from the chest down forever from that moment in time on," she said.

Kelly was in the Intensive Care Unit for a month and underwent eight surgeries before being able to go outside.

"That kind of trauma and that kind of hardship is a direct result of what I did to myself in a car, making stupid choices," she said.

She urged the spouses to pay attention to the road while driving and make sure they aren't distracted by reaching for something on the floor, texting or talking on the phone.

"It's not that hard to incorporate common sense into driving," Kelly said.

Ann Selander, a spouse attending the academy, said Kelly's story hit home for her because of

her old job as a rehab technician for people with spinal cord and brain injuries.

"I know how hard they have to work to go through speech, occupational and physical therapy. I think that any time they can turn a life-changing event into an education lesson for others, that's a brave thing," Selander said.

Julie Zwiebel, who helps run the academy, said by looking around the room after Kelly's story, she knew it had impacted the spouses.

"Kelly was a unique addition to the academy this week because her story ties into resiliency and our topics, such as substance abuse, which we talked about right after her story."

"Safety is extremely important, and we want all our spouses to take care of themselves," Zwiebel said.

The next RSA will be different from the previous courses, Zwiebel said, because it will take place on Fridays and Saturdays to accommodate working spouses.

The next academy will be Jan. 21 to 22, Jan. 28 to 29 and Feb. 5.

The wedding academy will be March 7 to 11, and the classes will alternate each month between the original academy days and the working spouse



Katherine Rosario | POST
Kelly Narowski shows members of the Resilient Spouse Academy the portions of the brain that can become injured during a car crash during a presentation Oct. 21 at the Army Community Service Annex. Narowski shared her story of how she became paralyzed from the chest down after being involved in a car crash.

academy, she said.

Cherie Cain, Mobilization and Personal Readiness manager, said she has been receiving calls from all over the world asking about the program.

"We're happy to set the standard for any RSA; other installations may start," she said.

The spouses deal with issues that impact them, she said, and the academy is there to help them learn how to work through

those issues and who to contact if they need help.

"Col. Brown was right, the spouses see it all first, they see any issues that may arise when their husband comes back from deployment, they see their

neighbor who is struggling with four kids and the house and a deployed spouse. For ladies to come in and go through these classes is perfect, and it's a small step to helping all of the Families," Cain said.

Selander said she signed up for the academy because she is new to the military lifestyle and wanted to be better prepared for her new life as a military spouse.

"It's a confidence booster to learn how to help other people because now I have the skills, and I can at least try," she said.

Anyone interested can sign up by calling Army Community Service at 785-239-9435.

FLYING HIGH



Shandi Dix | POST
Fort Riley children release 250 balloons Oct. 21 during the 11th annual "Lights on Celebration" at School Age Services. The Lights on Celebration is conducted in support of after-school programs at Fort Riley.

www.riley.army.mil

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