



Family Deployment Supplement to the Connecticut Guardian

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Guard thanks volunteers for tireless support

STAFF SGT. CAROLYN A. ASELTON
103RD FIGHTER WING PUBLIC AFFAIRS NCOIC

For an unassuming group of volunteers used to doing for others, invitation to a recognition dinner in its honor was humbling.

The Connecticut National Guard Family Support Program Recognition Night, which thanked its volunteers, took place Apr. 21 at Maneeley's Banquet Facility.

"I don't think I should be recognized at all. I've done nothing," said volunteer Chris Ronge, who spends time with Connecticut Supports Our Soldiers, a volunteer organization that ships care packages to the state's deployed Soldiers. "I was honored to be asked to come."

Kim Hoffman, coordinator, State Family Program, said the night's program was to ensure the volunteers knew how much their work was appreciated.

"Those invited represent those people who directly contributed time, service and gifts to the National Guard Family Program, and there are thousands others who made donations to the Connecticut National Guard Foundation who are being recognized," she said.

Hoffman added the past year had been a stressful one for Guard members and volunteers because of all the Guard deployments and the recent combat death of one of its Soldiers in Iraq.

"It was a very, very difficult year for all of you, and we're very grateful that you still took the time to help someone else," she said. "Tonight it's all about you."

Ronge, who attended the dinner with fellow CSOS members, said she volunteers her free time because the troops are risking their lives and she does not want them to be forgotten. She said she wanted them to know they are thought about.

"I have small children," she said. "It brings a special sensitivity to it."

Another volunteer, Bruce Maneeley, president of Maneeley's Banquets and Catering, has been supporting troops since he went into business nearly 20 years ago.

He said he was aware of the challenges servicemembers face, especially for their children around the holidays.

"They're all good people. You help them and their family, and they help you," he said.

Maneeley said he tries to stay involved as much as he can, to show support and focus

on the needs of the servicemembers and their families. Part of that support was to cater a welcome home party for the 103rd Fighter Wing when it returned from Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003.

Also sharing volunteer recognition and concern for the troops was a group of Vietnam veterans. The men are all combat veterans, said one of them, Rick Newell, and they want to give support they never received to today's Soldiers.

"It's giving back to our brothers who are serving the country and risking life and limb," he said. "We try to support the whole group."

Newell said one of his group's roles is the work with the troops when they return to ensure they are aware of benefits and programs available to them.

Though the volunteers enjoyed a relaxing night over dinner and conversation, they would not rest for long.

Connecticut National Guard has 400 Soldiers deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism and Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Some would return later in the month, Hoffman said, others would remain overseas for months.

Veterans Affairs reaches out to newest combat veterans

SPECIAL TO AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE

The Department of Veterans Affairs is expanding its efforts to reach veterans of combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan to ensure they are aware of benefits they have earned.

VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi is sending a personal letter to more than 150,000 veterans of Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom who have recently separated from the military to thank them for their service and to remind them of their eligibility for VA health care and other benefits.

"I want these men and women to know that we are grateful for their service to our country," Principi said. "Those who served in Afghanistan, Iraq and other places around the world have risked their lives to make America more secure. One of the ways the nation shows its gratitude is by ensuring veterans receive the benefits they deserve."

Principi's letter includes brochures and links to the department's Web pages that contain more details about VA benefits, including an opportunity to apply for benefits online.

As Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom veterans continue to leave the active-duty military, VA expects to mail about 10,000 letters each month. The first letters were sent May 10.

VA also regularly mails information packets to all service members separating from the military to remind them of eligibility for basic VA benefits, such as VA-guaranteed home loans and education benefits. In addition, there are provisions in these programs for reservists and National Guard members.

The additional outreach to those recently deployed to combat theaters alerts them to special eligibility that increases their access



Connecticut National Guard Family Support Program volunteers enjoy a dinner in their honor at Maneeley's Banquet and Catering in South Windsor Apr. 21. The volunteers put in countless hours over the last year as hundreds of Connecticut Soldiers and Airmen deployed in support of the war on terrorism. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Carolyn A. Aselton, 103rd Fighter Wing public affairs NCOIC)

See VA REACHES OUT Page S2

Quilts bring comfort to children of deployed service members

RUDI WILLIAMS
AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE

Ann Flaherty's 18-month-old grandson was suffering from the emotional stress of his father not coming home from work as he usually did. He carried pictures of his dad around, and began having temper tantrums and difficulty sleeping.

Then Flaherty came to the rescue with something that helps her grandson cope with the absence of his father. And it may eventually help hundreds of children of servicemen and women who are deployed to Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the globe.

A quilt artist, Flaherty made what she calls a "daddy quilt for her grandson, Christian Roman. It was the beginning of what has become a big program. In the case of a deployed mother, it's a "mommy quilt." Pillows also are made for the children of deployed service members.

The idea evolved out of watching her grandson's reaction to the absence of his father. Christian's father, Army Chief Warrant Officer Michael Roman, an Apache helicopter pilot, was deployed to Iraq at the onset of the Iraqi war, said Flaherty, whose daughter, son and son-in-law (Roman) all deployed to Iraq. Roman is married to Flaherty's daughter, Elisa.

"Christian started hoarding photographs," she said. "He would go into the living room and take all the framed photographs to his room and hide them. He was having temper tantrums and difficulty sleeping — reacting to his dad being gone."

Flaherty said she realized that she uses photography on many of her quilts. "So I took his favorite pictures and some others, scanned them, printed them on fabric and incorporated them into a quilt for him."

To her amazement, her grandson calmed down. "He slept better. He went to bed with his daddy blanket and dragged it everywhere he went. And it works!" said the pleased grandmother.

"My daughter told another family whose dad was deployed with Mike (Roman), and the mom was in Afghanistan," Flaherty said. "That little boy was having a really hard time. He was in the same daycare with Christian, so I made a quilt for him, and it worked for him, too."

Flaherty said children can't cuddle up to a photograph, but a quilt is a daily soft, tangible and comforting reminder of the parent.

As word got around, Flaherty made daddy and mommy quilts for "another child and I realized that this was going to be too much for me to do by myself."

She asked Lynne Grates, executive director of the Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base, N.C., Armed Services YMCA and Clitha Mason, the arts and humanities director, for help. "They loved the idea. So we formed 'Operation Kid Comfort,' Flaherty said. "So it was born out of necessity."

Operation Kid Comfort is designed to serve children, ages 5 and under, of deployed service members. The program addresses the emotional stress that children suffer during a parent's absence from home.

Operation Kid Comfort was so successful that it earned the Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base Armed Services YMCA branch the 2004 Raytheon Program Achievement Award in the Best New Program category. The award was recently presented during the ASYMCA's 17th annual Recognition Luncheon on Capitol Hill.

Flaherty said when the kids are given the quilts, they take instant, total possession of them. "Immediately, no one else can touch them," she said. "They're theirs. It's amazing how quickly it works and how quickly they react to having them."

"I just feel so happy that I can do something

for them," she said.

Flaherty estimated that, so far, about 100 quilts have been made for children of deployed military personnel. "We're still setting up the program and expect to exceed our goal of 1,500 by the end of the year," she noted.

"We've been approached by several units around the country asking for quilts," Flaherty noted. "One group has 3,000 service members being deployed, and they came to us and asked us to make quilts for the kids. The 82nd Airborne Division (Fort Bragg) is going back over, and they want quilts."

Flaherty had only one stipulation for recipients of the quilts: "On receiving a quilt, the parent or guardian of the child should realize that the quilt is for the

child — to play with, sleep with or just carry around — not to be used as a wall hanging for people to admire."

Last winter, Georgia (Statesboro) Southern University's assistant professor of marketing, Kathleen Gruben, arranged for two of her classes to take on Operation Kid Comfort as their class project. Flaherty said they developed marketing and advertising strategies and a Web site. They divided into groups according to geographic regions and developed strategies for each area and where military bases are located.

"For example," Flaherty noted, "when we're ready to take Operation Kid Comfort to Fort Hood, Texas, Fort Lewis, Wash., or to a Navy base, they've made a book for us that tells us where the sources, quilt shops, quilter's guilds, grant money, who the competition is and where the media outlets are."

Many individuals and organizations are supporting Operation Kid Comfort, such as

the Junior League of Fayetteville (N.C.) donating money to purchase a computer, monitor, software and a sewing machine. Staples donated software and cables. Hewlett-Packard donated a digital camera and two specialized scanners needed to do the photo transfers.

At the International Quilt Festival held in Houston last November, Quilts, Inc., accepted the program as their charity of the year. Participants at the festival donated about \$16,500 worth of fabric, batting and sewing notions. Kinko's of Houston donated and delivered 1,500 flyers to the volunteers at the festival, and Freeman Decorating Transportation Services donated the shipping and delivery of the donated items.

One Hour Koretizing in Fayetteville and Royal Cleaners on Fort Bragg washed and pressed the fabric.

"The more people hear about Operation Kid Comfort, the more they call and say, 'I want to help with it,'" Flaherty said. "People are calling me from all over the country saying, 'Send me the fabric and I'll make the quilts and send them back.'"

Quilt-making workshops are held at the Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base ASYMCA every Wednesday. "We're discussing scheduling other classes on different days with family readiness groups," she said. "We teach graphic arts, including scanning, editing and cropping photographs and how to print them onto fabric to make a quilt."

In addition to needing funds to support the program, Flaherty said Operation Kid Comfort needs fabric, batting, threads, sewing equipment, tools and supplies and photo transfer technology. All donations of goods are tax deductible.

For more information on Operation Kid Comfort, write to: ASYMCA of Fort Bragg/Pope Air Force Base, Clitha Mason, Arts and Humanities Director, Bldg. 2-2411, Fort Bragg, NC 28307

Or, write to: Operation Kid Comfort, 208 Thorncliff Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28303.

He slept better. He went to bed with his daddy blanket and dragged it everywhere he went. And it works!

Ann Flaherty



**HANDYPERSON
HOTLINE**

"CARRYING THE HOMEFRONT"

**SERGEANT MAJOR
TOBY P. CORMIER**
Ph: 860-441-2984
Cell: 860-209-0770
toby.cormier@ct.ngb.army.mil

Attention Soldiers, Airmen and Families

The Connecticut Guardian wants your photos!

If you have photos you wish to share with the rest of our Guard family, we would like to publish them in the Guardian.

We are looking for photos of soldiers and airmen who are deployed either relaxing or working. We are looking for photos of family members at home or at play. We are looking for photos of families packing care packages to send to their loved ones.

We will print them in the Guardian as space allows so they can be seen and shared by Connecticut Soldiers, Airmen and families around the world.

Please e-mail your photos to ctguardian@ct.ngb.army.mil

Connecticut National Guard Foundation- A year in review

KRIS SHAW
SECRETARY, CTNGFI

It is hard to believe that The Connecticut National Guard Foundation (CTNGFI) has been "in business" for over a year. We have been very busy connecting with the community, raising funds, and assisting our Soldiers, Airmen and their families.

Since 9/11 more than 2,500 Soldiers and Airmen of the Connecticut National Guard have been deployed to fight the Global War on Terrorism both at home and abroad, leaving the comforts of home and often lucrative civilian occupations to defend our great nation.

We quickly realized that unlike their active duty counterparts there was no post or base to provide emotional or financial support to our people and the Adjutant General had the vision to develop the concept of "Fort Connecticut".

Fort Connecticut would provide the resources for families to adjust and cope with the separation of their loved ones as they left home for the battlefield. The Fort would have two main programs to assist our priority; the families!

First, there would be our second to none Family Support Program. Under Family Support, families will find 12 family assistance centers located throughout the state, a 24-hour/7-day a week hotline, handyman services, counseling services, referral information, recreation activities for children, pot-luck dinners, Christmas parties and numerous other services.

Again, unlike our active duty

counterparts, we receive no federal funding for a "relief society" to assist our families financially during a time of emergency. The Connecticut National Guard Foundation was created to provide that type of temporary assistance and support to our members and their families either by form of a grant or loan.

Through charitable contributions the Foundation would provide financial aid within the guidelines established by our charter as a non-profit organization. In addition to monetary aid, the Foundation would also create yearly educational scholarships.

Since our creation in 2003, the CTNG Foundation has assisted many Soldiers, Airmen and their families in their time of need.

The Foundation has assisted the grateful parents of our seriously wounded sons and daughters who were sent to Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, D.C as they returned from Iraq.

The parents did not have the financial means to get to their children and on a moment's notice; we purchased the plane tickets, rental cars and assisted with necessary lodging to quickly put them by the wounded Soldiers' bedside.

On another occasion, a young Soldier we were able to assist was a great example of a true patriot! At 33, he wanted to serve his country to become a Military Policeman... forgoing an amazing hardship on himself and family. This private left the civilian world and family behind to incur a 50 percent reduction in pay just to defend our nation and show that one person can

truly make a difference. The Soldiers' proud wife and three young children did the best they could for several months but eventually required assistance from our Family Support Program and the Foundation. Along with their church, we were able to provide monetary assistance through the Foundation and in-kind assistance from our Family Support Program.

The Foundation has been able to assist Soldiers and Airmen at the home front too. On two occasions we provided assistance to Guardsmen when circumstances beyond their control caused them serious hardship. After interviewing both applicants, the Foundation made speedy payments and allowed the Soldier and Airman to get back on their feet.

During this past holiday season, Lt. Governor Jodi Rell adopted the Foundation under her Operation ELF program and the momentum skyrocketed from there!

We continue to reach out to the community and educate the citizens of Connecticut that their neighbors, co-workers, friends and families have served, are currently serving and will be for years to come.

There is no doubt, the war has come to Connecticut and we need to ensure our Soldiers and Airmen feel secure about the well-being and care for their families as they bravely fight this war. Additionally, for the ones who have served we need to be there as they transition back into the civilian community.

Many citizens, corporations and groups have heard our cry for help and have stepped up to the plate. Campaigns and Fundraising are the main revenue builders for this non-profit organization. The Foundation has been assisted by everyone from multi-million dollar corporations to a military veteran's motorcycle club. We have done numerous fundraisers from selling yellow ribbons to running marathons and from selling blankets to car shows.

In June 2004, we will give three \$500.00 educational scholarships to Soldiers, Airmen, and/or their spouses and children. Additionally, the Foundation will organize and oversee a memorial scholarship fund for a brave Connecticut Guardsman recently killed in action defending his country.

The Foundation continues to build strong community ties and works closely with the Adjutant General and the Connecticut National Guard Family Support Program to accomplish our mission.

Together, we have blended the Adjutant General's vision of Fort Connecticut and the needs of our families with extraordinary results!

The Foundation has had a very successful year, but there is still much more to do. We are committed to the more than 5,000 members of the Connecticut National Guard and their families who selflessly give of themselves to preserve the freedoms of this great country.

Please visit our website at www.ctngfoundation.org for further information.

WELCOME HOME COMMEMORATIVE T-SHIRTS HONORING THE 248TH EN COI

We would like to show our support for the 248th by wearing Welcome Home t-shirts to their Homecoming. The cost of the shirt will be \$12.00, all profits will support the units welcome home event to be held in December. Please submit your order form with payment as soon as possible so that we can distribute on Homecoming Day.

We appreciate your support of our soldiers! Mail your completed order forms to:
Meg Marx C/O 248th Homecoming Committee 38 Stott Ave Norwich CT 06360

The shirt will have the Engineering Emblem on the Left Chest with 03 on one side and 04 on the other, above the emblem will be 248th EN CO and below will be CTARNG. The back will have a yellow ribbon in the background with OIF (Operation Iraqi Freedom) followed by the bases they were stationed at: Al Asad, Ar Ramadi & Baghdad down the back; at the bottom below the yellow ribbon it will say Welcome Home!

In addition we would like to order a shirt for each of the soldiers that would be the same in design except for instead of Welcome home it would say "Been There, Done That!" You may place your orders for these shirts now as well, however, they will be presented at the Homecoming Celebration.

We have several other ideas for fundraising including a cookbook. If you would like to participate in the project please let us know or simply mail your favorite (or your soldier's) recipe to Cookbooks C/O Homecoming Committee 38 Stott Ave Norwich CT 06360. If we do not get enough participants we will not be able to complete this project. You can also email your recipes to andrea.lathrop@ct.ngb.army.mil. Thanks for your help!

Please detach and mail promptly to Meg Marx c/o 248th Homecoming Committee, 38 Stott Ave, Norwich CT 06360

Name _____ Phone # _____

Address _____

"Welcome Home" T-shirts
Size Requested: Adult Small [] Medium [] Large [] X-Large [] XX-L [] XXX-L []
Youth Small [] Medium [] Large [] X-Large []

"Been There, Done That!" T-shirts
Size Requested: Adult Small [] Medium [] Large [] X-Large [] XX-L []

Total Number of Shirts Requested _____ x12.00=Amount Enclosed _____
Please make your checks/money orders out to Meg Marx and put 248th T-shirts in the memo.

VA reaches out to new vets

From Page S1

to health care for two years after separation from the military for illnesses and injuries that may be the result of military service. For those medical problems, VA waives copayments for inpatient and outpatient care. VA focuses special attention on those with service-related disabilities, officials said. The department's goal is a seamless transition from military to VA services, with claims for financial benefits receiving expedited processing.

For the seriously wounded, VA has counselors working at the bedsides of patients in military hospitals with the largest numbers of casualties to begin benefit applications before they leave the military. VA social service personnel work at these military facilities to plan health care coordination as service members move from military to VA care. This helps

ensure a smooth transition to a VA hospital or clinic near the veteran's intended residence for continuity of medical care, officials said.

In partnership with state and local government benefits counselors and veterans service organization representatives, VA annually briefs about 200,000 service members around the world before discharge to help prepare them for civilian transition and VA benefits. The department operates benefits offices at 133 military installations to help service members with conditions arising during service prepare to begin receiving VA compensation promptly after discharge.

"VA has learned many lessons since the Gulf War in 1991 and other conflicts, which will ensure that this newest generation of war veterans receives the health care and assistance they deserve when they return to civilian life," Principi said.

For deployment-related questions, call 1-800-858-2677

Family Assistance Center locations

Family Assistance Centers are set-up in the following armories around the state:

Bristol Armory
61 Center Street, Bristol, CT 06010
(860) 582-1206 Toll Free 866-347-2283
Sgt. Michael Bertoli

Waterbury Armory
64 Field Street, Waterbury, CT 06702
(203) 574-2406 Toll Free 866-347-2291
Sgt. Jonathon Duffy & Spec. Tamara Jex

Manchester Armory & AVCRAD
330 Main Street, Manchester, CT 06040
(860) 646-0780 Toll Free 866-347-2286 Capt. Lauri Tinelle

103rd FW, Bradley ANG Base
Bldg 8, East Granby, CT 06026
(860) 292-2730 Mrs. Donna Rivera

Hartford Armory
360 Broad Street, Hartford, CT 06105-3795
1-800-858-2677
Mrs. Kim Hoffman, Mrs. Michelle McCarty, Mrs. Marina Sedor,
Mrs. Karen Somes, OC Claude Hibbert and Sgt. Jessica McKenna

Norwich Armory
38 Stott Avenue, Norwich, CT 06360
(860) 823-1342 Ext. 12 Toll Free 866-347-3357
Mrs. Andrea Lathrop

103rd Air Control Squadron
206 Boston Post Road, Orange, CT 06477
(203) 795-2983 Charlie and Jane Solomon

118th Medical Company
Location to be announced
Sgt. Geanabelle Burmudez (860) 883-6936
Sgt. Elizabeth Crouthamel (860) 883-6935

Volunteers are needed in each facility.
Those wishing to help out can contact Mrs. Kim Hoffman, Family Program Manager at 1-800-858-2677.

Any family member or loved one of a deployed soldier who has questions about benefits or deployment issues may also get answers to their question at the following email address: kim.hoffman@ct.ngb.army.mil

PUZZLING POSTCARDS

ADRIENN OLMSTEAD

Sometimes it gets difficult writing to our favorite Soldier because there is not much new going on to talk about. With summer vacation coming up and the weather getting warmer, it is time to start playing and having fun! Let's include our favorite Soldier into our plans by sending him/her some puzzling postcards. Usually postcards cost around 30 cents each, and sometimes they can be found cheaper buying more than one. Here's how to put a smile on a Soldier's face!

1. Write your message on the back of the postcard.
2. Cut the postcard into large puzzle pieces.
3. Put all the pieces into an envelope addressed to your favorite Soldier.
4. Once received, your puzzling postcard will need to be put together before it can be read.

What a great way to help our favorite Soldier have a little summertime fun!

THINK SAFE THIS SUMMER!

**Kids'
Creative
Corner**

**A MONTHLY FEATURE OF
FUN AND EDUCATIONAL
ACTIVITIES**