

A military child fights against the tug of a large rubber band as he tries to place a beanbag in the goal of one of the inflatable games during the annual Children's Festival at Fort Rucker, Ala.

PHOTO BY RUSSELL SELLERS



Military Leaders Reaffirm Commitment to Families

Over the past five years, the Department of Defense (DoD) has improved support networks for military families in a myriad of ways, from new facilities, such as child development centers (CDCs) and youth centers to new programs and respite care for spouses and dependents. And with the economic backdrop such as it is, military leaders are saying that this vitally important quality-of-life support will not be diminished, and will remain at the high levels necessary to keep our service members and their families strong and resilient.

“Over 10 years of war, these men and women, and the families who support them, have shown their adaptability, versatility and patriotism in the face of a new combination of threats and unexpected operating environments,” said Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta. “We now have the most-experienced, battle-hardened all-volunteer force in our nation’s history – a generation that learned and institutionalized new concepts and new capabilities in irregular warfare. They are, quite simply, our greatest strategic asset and they are as far as I am concerned the new ‘greatest generation’ in our history.

“We need to preserve the intellectual and battlefield

capital of our military – the innovative and battle-hardened leaders who pushed the force to adapt to changing circumstances and enemies. We need to ensure that the force we have is sufficiently trained to be ready and deployable. And we need to ensure that they and their families have what they need to meet their needs, at home as well as on the battlefield.”

Panetta noted that maintaining this level of support during tough fiscal times is a challenge.

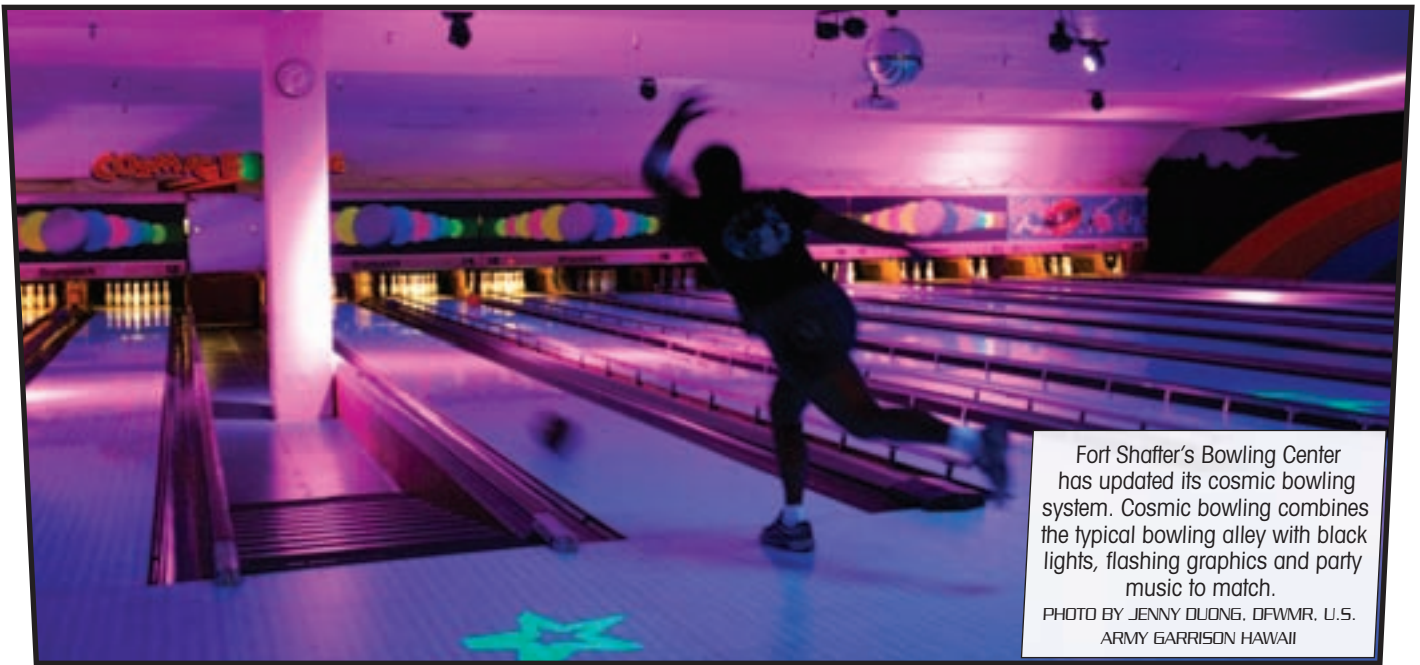
“This will be an area of extreme challenge, because my highest priority is obviously to maintain the vitality of our all-volunteer force – and keep faith with the men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend the country and been deployed time, and time, again,” he said. “The 1 percent of the country that has served in uniform, and their families, have borne the heavy costs of war for 10 years. They cannot be expected to bear the full costs of fiscal austerity as well.

“We must remember that the American people and our partners across the globe are safer, more stable, and more prosperous because of our global leadership, and the strength of our military.”

ARMY FAMILY COVENANT

Since the Army Family Covenant was signed in 2007, Army installations worldwide have benefitted

Family Support



Fort Shafter's Bowling Center has updated its cosmic bowling system. Cosmic bowling combines the typical bowling alley with black lights, flashing graphics and party music to match.

PHOTO BY JENNY DUONG, DFWMR, U.S. ARMY GARRISON HAWAII

from this commitment to increased support and funding for service members and their families. From new CDCs and youth centers to increased support and programming for spouses and dependent children of those who are deployed, the Army has put its money where its mouth is.

According to the Army 2010 Sustainability Report released in September 2011, the Army built 127 new CDCs and 23 new Youth Centers between fiscal 2008 and 2009 in support of soldier and family quality of life. Operating hours at these and similar facilities were also extended. The number of supporting communities signing community covenant support agreements increased by 297 percent, with 338 covenants in place at the end of fiscal 2009, up from only 85 at the end of fiscal 2008.

In addition, a variety of programs have been developed and enhanced over the past four years, including Survivor Outreach Services, Child, Youth and School Services, Exceptional Family Member respite care and New Parent Support.

In a symbolic gesture that reconfirmed the Army's recommitment to families for 2012 and beyond, Army Secretary John M. McHugh, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Raymond T. Odierno, USA, and Sgt. Maj. of the Army Raymond F. Chandler III signed the Army Family Covenant at the 2011 Association of the United States Army (AUSA) Annual Meeting and Exposition in October 2011.

"We don't talk enough about our families, about what we've gone through," Odierno said. "We sometimes don't know the impact it's had on our children, and I do worry about that. What are we doing for our children? Wherever I go, I talk about [how] our children are the strength of our nation, our children are the strength of our Army, and how we help them to get through these numerous deployments and how we help them to cope with issues of missing Dad or Mom."

Odierno noted that the Army must uphold its promise to families even after our service members return home from Afghanistan.

"We're going to have a lot of work to do after that as well, because we'll have to continue to deal with family issues [and] family programs for years to come," he continued. "We have to ensure that we're invested in them, and we have to ensure we

understand what those issues are."

Although the Army must learn to adapt in this new era of fiscal responsibility and possible future cuts, Army leadership promised that cuts would not come at the expense of families.

"We will not make family programs the bill payers for other kinds of initiatives," said McHugh, who noted that the Army wants to hear from families.

"We've got folks under our jurisdiction who are looking at these things, but we're going to be heavily dependent – and it's not just the family programs, quite honestly, it's a lot of facilities-based initiatives – as to what folks like you think works and what doesn't to keep us absolutely on point," he explained. "We're not going to cut budgets just to cut budgets, but we have put an enormous amount of money – over \$1.2 billion – in family programs, and we've got to make sure that we're not funding something with a lot of money that you folks either don't know about, are confused about or you don't take advantage of it."

BOWLING OVER FAMILIES

Throughout the military, the effort to provide more family-friendly facilities and programs has never been more evident, as Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) professionals work with leadership to provide hubs or destination points for families, whether it is a bowling center or mini golf course or a family fun day.

At Fort Shafter, Hawaii, the bowling center underwent a remodeling that has made the facility more fun and exciting for the whole family. With the new upgrades, the family fun center is now able to offer cosmic bowling or "glow bowling," which combines the typical bowling alley with black lights, flashing graphics and party music to match.

"Over the years, bowling became more attractive to the younger market, for birthday parties and for family/company get-togethers," said Don Yonamine, manager, Fort Shafter Bowling Center. "To accommodate this trend, we have upgraded our cosmic bowling to improve the outdated and failing sound system and lighting."

Renovations started in September 2011 for the new cosmic bowling system, as well as two new big screens with LCD pro-

Family Support



Connor O. Jagger, 8, a third-grade student at Matthew C. Perry Elementary School student, performs through the high knees portion of an obstacle course here during the MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, Family Fun Fitness Festival.



Family Fun Day at Cannon AFB, N.M.

jectors, three new LCD flat-screen TVs, the latest Brunswick scoring system and the new Brunswick Synthetic Pro Lanes.

“The cosmic bowling program is a perfect venue for Fort Shafter since the installation does not have a facility such as the Tropics Warrior Zone on Schofield Barracks,” said Rhonda Hunter, chief, Business Operations Division, Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, U.S. Army Garrison-Hawaii.

With the new cosmic bowling system in place, soldiers and families are already enjoying their new bowling experiences.

“Bowling is a game that the whole family can enjoy together,” Yonamine said. “Whether you’re a serious bowler or just a novice, the new upgrades and improvements will benefit both types of bowlers.”

FAMILY FUN FITNESS FESTIVAL

Another great way to get families out and playing together is by hosting family fun days or events that can galvanize a community. Each year at MCAS Iwakuni, Japan, for example, the Family Fun Fitness Festival provides an opportunity for families to come out and have some fun while learning about health and fitness.

According to Lance Cpl. Kenneth K. Trotter Jr., MCAS Iwakuni Public Affairs, the festival informed families of the benefits of healthier living and proper exercise and nutrition. “Semper Fit had various displays showcasing interesting facts concerning issues some residents did not know. The display booths were set up in such a way as to funnel informants toward the less commonly known health facts.”

“The whole point of this was to educate and inform the community,” adds Alma Dickinson, Semper Fit Health Promotions director. “That’s why we have the info booths. Some of the booths were geared not just toward children or families, but also some of the junior Marines.”

One of the goals of the festival was to introduce children to healthy food choices.

“They’re young,” said Dickinson. “We wanted to introduce them to healthy options in their diet early on.”

Along with healthier eating habits, exercise was also focused on at the festival.

Parents and youth were introduced to the TRX – The Total Resistance Exercise Suspension Trainer. Children and adults attempted to beat the device in a test of endurance and strength in such exercises as inverted rows and suspended burpees. Adults took part in the 30/30 challenge, performing 30 repetitions of a particular exercise and then resting for one minute before performing another 30 reps of another exercise. Children only had to do 15 reps.

IronWorks Gym Athletic Director Thomas F. Durning demonstrated how the TRX works and provided information and guidance.

“The TRX was rough,” said Carnessa L. Pulliam, a festival attendee. “I put a physical training session in here today. It was a challenge.”

According to Trotter, Jr., “One booth that caught people’s attention was the display of two blocks, one representing five pounds of fat and the other, five pounds of muscle. The block of fat was thick and mushy, taking up twice as much space as the muscle block. Many people were surprised by how much more space the fat tissue occupied compared to muscle.”

In addition to the learning, there was a lot of fun to be had for all, as children played in a bounce house and participated in a miniature obstacle course comprised of jumping over hurdles, bouncy balls and performing high knees.

More than \$500 was awarded during giveaways, ranging from gift cards to watches and sporting apparel.

—GRF