

Fort Sam Houston

Building on Strong MWR Infrastructure

Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) professionals at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, have been busy the past few years, as the installation prepares to increase in size as a result of the Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process.

“We are going to go from an average daily load of 5,000 students (military trainees) to over 9,000,” says Terry Frost, 502nd Force Support Squadron acting director. “That is the equivalent of combining the number of students from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point with the U.S. Air Force Academy, and having them all right here.”

As Fort Sam Houston nears the end of the joint basing process (joint basing must be completed by October), the installation will keep its name but be led by what is now Joint Base San Antonio.

“We are approaching the completion of what we call BRAC projects that have begun here, which were sorely needed with the expected influx of people,” says Frost. “We are truly going to be a joint base, and MWR will be taking care of Soldiers, Airmen, Sailors, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and their families. The Air Force terminology for what the Army calls MWR Director is different but our goals in providing high-quality MWR programs and facilities are the same, and that is what we have built our relationship on.”

With such a diverse population at Fort Sam Houston, in-

cluding a multitude of various service agencies and commands on post, Frost and his staff provide vitally important MWR programs for active duty service members as well as their family members, retirees and civilians working on the installation.

“The military members are called on often to deploy, and as part of a resiliency program or as part of helping these families during challenging times, MWR is here to provide them support,” notes Frost. “We see ourselves as an integral part of their ability to withstand the rigors and challenges of the separation from their loved ones and help them during that time with wholesome activities, and recreation programs to help them raise their children and overcome the loneliness of separation. We also have programs through our Army Community Services that are there to help the spouses and families deal with those challenges.”

BUILDING UP MWR

Fort Sam Houston has completed many new projects over the past few years in an effort to build up its MWR infrastructure (facilities and programs) in preparation for the influx of new military trainees.

A new \$7.5 million, 20,000 square foot youth center, for ages 12-18, has been in operation for over a year, and houses a full gymnasium, a computer lab, an arts and crafts room, music rooms, functional areas, lounges and a state-of-the-art working kitchen for teaching purposes.





“This project is a great example of the Family & Morale, Welfare and Recreation Command’s (FWMRC) effort to continue to support Army soldiers and families with the kind of facilities, programs and services that their children and teenagers can use to help improve their quality of life,” notes Frost. “The teaching kitchen has actually been one of the more popular programs at the Youth Center, and allows students to learn how to cook from our staff and visiting chefs.”

The youth center gym is used for open play and organized leagues for basketball, for youth ages 10-18. When the older children are in school during the day, younger children from the nearby Child Development Center (CDC) use the gym. Instructors work with the young children from the CDC, teaching them to exercise and learn sports through organized play.

Other great additions for families are the five new ADA-compliant, handicapped accessible Miracle Recreation playgrounds and Sun Ports shade structures. The playgrounds are built with the similar intent of Boundless playgrounds, with the overall goal of providing greater accessibility to play features for those with physical limitations.

“A nice feature of the playgrounds is that they allow individuals in wheelchairs freer access and more accessibility to the play features,” notes Frost. “That is a real nice thing to have for family members – both the able-bodied and those in wheelchairs – to share a playground experience without too many limitations and easier access, including wider walkways and rolling ramps, which allow wheelchairs access to different parts of the playground.”

The five new playgrounds are located near the housing areas, the youth center and CDC, providing easy access by families.

Another important project for families nearing completion is a new \$8 million School Aged Services building, which will provide programs for youth as well as summer camps. The

building will house a computer lab (for learning and homework help after school), as well as a new playground and outdoor area for games. MWR also supports a program called Discovery Learning, which is an outdoor-based education program for children.

VISION FOR FAMILY COMPLEX

Co-located with the School Aged Services facility, the Dodd Field Sports Complex has a multitude of different outdoor activities that families and children can engage in.

“Dodd is a family and youth program area that was a long-term project and development that we started almost 15 years ago,” Frost explains. “The idea was to complement our indoor facilities with outdoor support facilities.”

At the heart of the complex are four baseball fields, including two little league fields, a junior field (for ages 13-18) and an adult field, each with appropriate home run fences, spectator seating and dugouts.

“As part of the complex, the fields kind of function as the anchor but we have patios and pavilions for picnics and a splash pad, which has a number of spray features,” notes Frost. The splash pad has an automatic turn on/off sensor, so when no one is using the pad it will automatically turn off, “so it saves water and is environmentally friendly,” he adds. The splash pad also has shade structures that are shaped as sails, which add to the look of the area.

In addition to the fields and spray park, the complex has two playgrounds, areas for gaming/play, and a new skatepark that was added two years ago. The Skatewave skatepark equipment features a number of modules, ramps, rails, half pipes and boxes to rollerblade or skate on, as well as an obstacle course. Rules are posted and protective gear is required. MWR is looking to make some improvements, including adding some shade structures and lights, notes Frost.

The Dodd complex has a number of support facilities as well as shade structures, which provide shade from the hot Texas sun and protect spectators from foul balls. “That has been a real nice feature,” notes Frost. “The sun shades are just a tremendous value to our customers and our program in terms of comfort and quality of life. They have lasted 10 years, and they look as good as they did the day we put them in.”

An older youth center is located at the Dodd Complex as well, and combined with the new youth center, provides great opportunities for youth on base.

“The Army has made a commitment to soldiers and their families to maintain their quality of life,” Frost explains. “With the Army Family Covenant, the community got together with leadership here to sign off on it, with the goal of continuing to invest in these types of quality-of-life programs and facilities, which help ease the burden of military life. It can be challenging to families when spouses have to deploy for extended periods of time. So, the Army’s commitment is: You don’t have to worry about your family while you are deployed; we are going to help take care of your family back here at the home station.”

Fort Sam Houston offers opportunities for youth ages 6-18 to experience, develop and grow by participating in art, fitness, life skills and adventure activities called the Edge. In addition, the Hired Apprenticeship Program provides youth, ages 15-18 with meaningful paid work experience in MWR programs. Hired allows teenagers to explore career opportunities and gain valuable training and skills that will help them with future employment.

RECREATION/AQUATICS

Recreation programs and facilities are a vital part of what makes MWR tick. The Aquatic Center swimming pool features a big, circular water slide as well as a speed slide, which young people and families enjoy.

One of the more popular outdoor activities is golf, and Fort Sam Houston has two 18-hole golf courses with a club house, driving range and putting green. “Golf is very popular and is one of our more financially profitable MWR activities,” says Frost. “With the two courses you get a lot of play and the add-

ed challenge of two different courses. We find our members really enjoy that.”

With the weather perfect for outdoor activities almost 365 days a year, the equipment rental facility provides all kinds of recreational equipment that can be rented at very reasonable prices, such as gear for hiking, camping, hunting and fishing.

Frost points out that with the influx of new talent in the outdoor recreation department, the idea is to provide more outdoor adventure trips and activities. “We want to develop more outdoor adventures and put together trips where we get together with local outfitters to provide equipment and help organize a kayak or canoe or rock climbing trip.”

Fort Sam Houston is also embracing a program called Recreation Delivery. “Recreation Delivery is a concept where we take the program to the customer, as opposed to waiting for them to come to us,” notes Frost. “We want to be their resource and help them connect with the right outfitters and the right equipment. We have been talking with our customer base, mainly the young service members, and asking them what kind of trips they want.”

WOUNDED WARRIOR SUPPORT

MWR is also doing a lot in support of Wounded Warriors. “In our Warrior Transition Unit (WTU) and our Warrior Family Support Center, we offer a number of programs that are all about helping these young people overcome their injuries and helping them rebuild their lives,” Frost points out. “Part of it is getting them out there and making sure they are social and getting back into community activities and events with their families and other soldiers.”

He points out that providing programs for Wounded Warriors can be a challenge, especially considering the severity of some of their injuries. “Our program is designed to help them specifically with their individual needs, and we have a number of adventure programs that they participate in, but we have to be careful,” he says. “For example, with burn victims, we need to make sure that they have enough skin protection from the hot sun here, as well as accommodate those in wheelchairs or with prosthetics. There are some wonderful groups out there that provide all kinds opportunities for service members, such





as hunting, boating and fishing (deep sea and fresh water) as well as a number of organizations and people who donate their time and resources to offer wounded warriors an opportunity to engage in activities that they normally wouldn't be able to do."

MWR works closely with the WTUs and supports the Military Adaptive Sports Program (MASPRO), which helps wounded warriors to participate in sports, including wheelchair basketball and volleyball, and is designed to engage and encourage Wounded Warriors to participate in sports activities, leagues and games.

In addition to adaptive sports, the equestrian program is working with wounded warriors to provide recreation therapy. "We have employees who were certified to use horse back riding as a way to rehab wounded warriors, no matter what the injury is that they have," Frost explains. "Research suggests that people with mental and physical injuries seem to relate very well to horses and in turn the horses bond well with the individuals as well. It is a great program that allows the staff to help individuals with physical limitations to ride horses."

ON THE HORIZON

In addition to the bevy of completed quality-of-life projects, Fort Sam Houston is getting set to open a new \$12 million, 45,000-square-foot fitness center in June. The fitness center will have a lot of open areas with cardio equipment, strength equipment, aerobic rooms and an elevated running track overlooking the full size basketball court, which can be divided into smaller courts. The gym can hold up to 2,000 in

the bleacher seating and will have a maple hardwood floor. "This new fitness center will be a big boost for us," says Frost.

MWR has a number of projects that have been designed and are awaiting congressional approval and/or funding. One of these projects is a new student activity center, which will function as a modern recreation center for military members and students in the medical education-training program. The facility will house a snack bar, lounges, a computer lab, an arcade, video gaming areas, pool tables, foosball and music rooms. The three floor recreation center will feature a dance/music area on the first floor, and outdoor patio areas on all three levels.

In addition to future plans for giving the bowling center a facelift and possibly adding more lanes, there are a number of areas that Frost says he would like to see some long-range development. In the outdoor recreation area, the post has another sports park that is being built, which will have a complex of four softball fields, a walking trail and a multi-use facility.

"This outdoor recreation area is being built near a greenbelt area called Salado Creek, which has Salado Park, and we want to develop a dog park there," says Frost. "We have a lot of pet lovers here, and every few months we have a 5K Run and Doggie Dash. We also run the Doggie Dash and Dip on the last weekend of the year, when we let the dogs finish their run by jumping into the aquatic center pool. They love it and have a great time. Because it is done at the end of the season, we then close the pool and drain it and perform our winter maintenance work."

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