

ARMY FAMILIES DRAW /// ATTENTION TO ISSUES

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Adversity is a part of life. Every family faces adversity at some point, but for Army Families things can be more difficult. With Soldiers deploying to war and leaving their spouses alone to raise their kids for a year or more, or sometimes even both parents deploying leaving grandparents or older siblings raising their families, things can get really complicated. The Army Family Action Plan (AFAP) was developed to address these and many other additional challenges that are common with Army Family life. AFAP is a grass roots program that directs actions in an attempt to resolve issues that will improve the quality of life for Soldiers and their Families.

U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command conducted their local AFAP Conference June 16-20 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The conference, spearheaded by Karen Butler of the SMDC/ARSTRAT G1, had more than 30 delegates from around the command form into three workgroups to discuss issues of concern to the total Army, as well as local issues within the command. In addition to the delegates, each workgroup included a facilitator, a recorder and an issue support person. Each group discussed and debated issues over three days, often calling in a variety of subject matter experts when needed.



Delegates read over issues during the 2008 U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Army Family Action Plan Conference.

After the three days of discussions, the workgroups presented their issues and recommended solutions in an out brief to the SMDC/ARSTRAT leadership team of Commanding General, LTG Kevin T. Campbell and CSM Ralph Borja. Also present and participating in the out brief discussions were Deputy Commanding General for Operations, BG John E. Seward, Commander, 1st Space Brigade, COL Timothy Coffin and Commander, 100th Missile Defense Brigade (GMD), COL Michael Yowell. The spouses of command leaders who were also in attendance were Kathy Campbell, Nyuget Borja, Lisa Seward, and Cheryl Coffin, with Campbell and Borja also serving as observers throughout the conference.

During the out brief, workgroup 1 spokesperson, PFC Josh Redditt gave a personal account of why his group chose Discount for Substandard Privatized Military Housing as one of their issues.

“I myself am an E-3 who lives next door to a staff sergeant on Fort Detrick,” said Redditt. “I pay \$1,233 a month but the staff sergeant next to me pays \$1,686 a month for the exact same units. This staff sergeant works everyday with another staff sergeant (who lives) on the other side of post in the new housing. They both pay \$1,686 a month, but that other staff sergeant on the other side of post has



LEFT: Delegate, SGT Thomas Hernandez, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 53rd Signal Battalion addresses the leadership during the 2008 U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Army Family Action Plan Conference.

the benefits of a garage, carpet, much larger bedrooms and individually controlled heating and air.”

“There’s really no way to put this sir, other than it’s just not fair. Some Soldiers are paying so much more for the same and some Soldiers are paying the same for so much less.”

Responding to the issues presented, Campbell told the delegates, “I told the group last year, I don’t make any promises because I don’t control it ultimately, but I do promise you that we will tackle the issue, and we will push it until we get a satisfactory answer from the right level of command that tells us why.”

At the end of the out brief, delegates voted on their top three issues to be sent to the Department of the Army AFAP Conference later this year. In first place was Discount for Substandard Privatized Military Housing, with Housing Waiting List Procedures for Inbound Soldiers and Medical Staffing Model for Military Treatment Facilities tying for second. Dislocation Allowance (DLA) for all Soldiers, and Federal Employee Retirement System (FERS) Sick Leave Conversion followed respectively.

Local issues also brought up to the SMDC/ARSTRAT command team included: Active Guard Reserve (AGR) Life cycle Management in the 100th Missile Defense Brigade; Peterson Air Force Base Child Care; Inadequate Inter-Service Support; Absence of a DeCA Facility on Kwajalein Atoll (USAKA); and “Reach the SMDC/ARSTRAT Family” Campaign.

In its 25 years, AFAP has lead the way in improving the quality of life for Army Families. To attest to this, Butler recounted a conversation she overheard where a delegate was being met with resistance on an issue, and was told they could not go in a certain direction with their recommended solution. The delegates reply, “We can go there; that is the power of AFAP!”

BELOW: Delegates research an issue during the 2008 U.S. Army Space and Missile Defense Command/Army Forces Strategic Command Army Family Action Plan Conference.

Photos by Sharon L. Hartman

