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# **CITY SUPPORT FOR AMERICA'S TROOPS AND MILITARY INSTALLATIONS**

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*Best Practices in 26 Cities*



**The United States Conference of Mayors  
June 2008**

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*This report was prepared by City Policy Associates, Washington, D.C. It may be downloaded at The U.S. Conference of Mayors Web site, [www.usmayors.org](http://www.usmayors.org).*

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## FOREWORD

This report describes efforts that have been undertaken in U.S. cities, large and small, to convey to military personnel and their families the gratitude felt for the sacrifices they have made in the service of this Nation.

The war on terrorism has called for the deployment and redeployment of large numbers of U.S. forces, active and reserve. One result is that cities today are seeing departures and arrivals of service members and their families on a scale not experienced in decades. This is a time when mayors can, and should, learn from one another about the issues that returning service members must deal with, the impact that multiple tours of duty are having on them, the special needs of single-parent military families, and other issues that affect the communities in which these individuals and their families reside.

The initiatives described in the report range from comprehensive city-wide efforts to ease the transition of veterans from military to civilian life, to more narrowly-focused efforts to welcome service personnel home with events and services that simply say “thank you” to them and their families. They were submitted by mayors across the country in response to a request I made as Chair of the newly-formed U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Community and Military Relations, a group that held its first meeting January 24 during the Conference’s 2008 Winter Meeting in Washington, D.C. The goal of the task force is to help mayors share ideas for ways to support military men and women and their families, and ways to enhance relationships between cities and local military installations. Our first step toward this goal is this community-military relations “best practices” report.

In requesting material for this report I suggested that mayors might want to describe local efforts to recognize the collective and/or individual contributions made to the Nation by military men and women, both active and reserve; programs which provide aid or assistance before, during, or after deployment to service personnel and their families; policies and practices of the city as an employer of service personnel; offices or personnel within City Hall charged with the responsibility for community-military initiatives; or task forces, committees, or other bodies which bring together military personnel, community members, and city officials to encourage, develop, or implement programs to recognize or benefit service personnel.

I am pleased to report that the responses received from 26 mayors include excellent examples of all of these types of initiatives. I also requested, and received from many mayors, examples of efforts to improve ongoing working relationships with area military installations, and those have been included in this report as well. All mayors of cities having a strong military presence understand that successful relationships depend on commitments made by both the civilian and military communities, and that improving quality of life for service personnel and their families should be a responsibility shared by both civilian and military leaders.

On April 17 the U.S. Army launched its Army Community Covenant, described as a new campaign to formalize community support for soldiers and their families. The goal is to develop and foster effective state and community partnerships with the Army that will sustain and improve the quality of life of soldiers and families at their current duty stations and as they

transfer to other states. The first official Covenant signing, on April 17 in Columbus, Georgia, involved local leaders representing Columbus and Fort Benning. Similar ceremonies, many involving the other service branches, are being held in several other cities through the end of this year.

Of particular interest to mayors, I believe, is the Covenant's Web site – [http://www.acsim.army.mil/community\\_covenant](http://www.acsim.army.mil/community_covenant) – which lists national, state, and local “best practices,” including some of those in my City of Anchorage and some that have been contributed by other cities for this report. The Director of the Community Covenant Task Force, Major General Craig Whelden, USA (ret.), can be contacted through October at (703) 601-1934.

On behalf of our Task Force, I sincerely thank the mayors and other community leaders who have described their many efforts for us. Their willingness to do this has resulted in a report that should be of value to any mayor wanting to do more for the men and women of our armed forces – active, reserve, and National Guard – and their families who have earned our respect and deserve our support.

Mark Begich  
Mayor of Anchorage and Chair  
Task Force on Military and Community Relations  
The U.S. Conference of Mayors

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**HUNTSVILLE, AL**  
**Mayor Loretta Spencer**

**SUPPORT FOR REDSTONE ARSENAL AND PERSONNEL**

The Huntsville community is very mindful of the importance of the Army's Redstone Arsenal and area National Guard units. Recognizing the need to extend more services to the approximately 900 family members of servicemen and women deployed during Christmas, the North Alabama Veteran's and Fraternal Organization's Coalition created "Operation Christmas Bear," a carnival-like community celebration held at the Cahaba Shrine in Huntsville. With the help of numerous volunteers and sponsors (Kroger's supplies food for all in attendance), children are treated to a day of gifts and entertainment: a teddy bear sporting a camouflage-printed scarf with the inscription "My Dad/Mom is My Hero," face painting, a climbing wall, movies, and a petting zoo. Family members can have their picture made with Santa and Mrs. Claus to send, along with a personal message and holiday crafts they made during the day, to their fathers, mothers, and other family members overseas.

Mayor Loretta Spencer was given a unique opportunity to win the hometown premier of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's recently released film, *Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who!* In her first conversation with the studio, Mayor Spencer negotiated to have free movie screenings for military families based at the Redstone Arsenal if Huntsville topped eleven other cities in a competition to shout "We are here" the loudest. Huntsville won with a shout recorded before a military appreciation night at a Huntsville Havoc ice hockey game. The Mayor contacted local Army officials to enlist the help of the more than 200 men and women attending a training session at Redstone Arsenal. More than 500 people, including Mayor Spencer and Major General James Myles, Commanding General, U.S. Army Aviation and Missile Command, participated in the shout, with Major General Myles rallying the soldiers to higher decibel levels by running through their ranks.

The Mayor's effort to organize the community and secure the support of local media and Monaco Pictures, an upscale theater near the Army base, resulted in approximately 1,200 military families attending the movie's national premier at the theatre at no cost. Children were given plush "Horton" elephant ears to enjoy during and after the movie. Mayor Spencer realized the opportunity to provide a unique experience to express appreciation to our men and women in the Armed Forces and their families. Simply by organizing the community and garnering the support of local media and Monaco Pictures, these families enjoyed the movie's national premier at no cost.

The City is presently working with the local Still Serving Veterans organization and the Kiwanis Club to build an accessible playground for returning soldiers who are working to overcome physical and mental challenges. The playground is designed to allow parents in this situation to enjoy interacting with their children.

**CONTACT:** Denise Taylor, Director of Public Communications, City of Huntsville, (256) 427-5000 or [denise.taylor@hsvcity.com](mailto:denise.taylor@hsvcity.com).

**ANCHORAGE, AK**  
**Mayor Mark Begich**

**SPECIAL ASSISTANT FOR MILITARY AFFAIRS/  
ANCHORAGE FIRST LADY INITIATIVE**

Anchorage is truly a military town. Elmendorf Air Force Base, Fort Richardson, Kulis Air National Guard Base, a U.S. Coast Guard presence at the Port of Anchorage, and several Army and Air Force Reserve and National Guard units account for more than 15,000 service members and additional thousands of their family members who reside on base and in the community. Anchorage is also home to more than 20,000 veterans.

*Special Assistant for Military and Veterans Affairs* – A retired Army Vietnam veteran now serves in the Mayor’s Office as a full time Special Assistant for Military and Veterans Affairs. The new position was created to ensure that there would be someone on staff who would wake up every morning thinking about the military and its relationship with the Municipality and the community, and to guarantee that someone is always available to provide timely information, guidance, and coordination for the service members and veterans in the community. The Special Assistant is present at all military functions, either with the Mayor or as his representative; this nearly daily contact adds to the credibility of the Municipality’s commitment to the military, its families, and its veterans.

The Special Assistant serves the Municipality’s Employee Relations Department in an instructional capacity, clarifying responsibilities in regard to the more than 70 National Guard and reserve employees who have been deploying for long periods of time at an unprecedented rate. The Special Assistant has helped formulate an improved veteran hiring policy, an improved military leave policy, and greater recognition of citizen soldiers in general – efforts which have earned the City special recognition from the National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve: Two years ago the Committee awarded the City its national five-star rating.

The Special Assistant has also helped to identify needs within the military infrastructure that may have gone unnoticed because of both cultural and regulatory barriers that make it difficult for the military to seek outside assistance. Identifying these needs gave the Municipality an opportunity to further its commitment to men and women in uniform. Recently, the Municipality provided two handicap accessible surplus vans to the Warrior Transition Unit at Fort Richardson. It also worked with the State Department of Transportation to relocate a large pedestrian overpass that was being replaced to the Army’s Fort Wainwright; installed over a major highway there, this overpass improves safety for service members and their families.

Additional responsibilities of the Special Assistant include service on the boards of the Veterans Administration’s Domiciliary, a 50-bed treatment and rehabilitation program, and the Salvation Army’s Adult Rehabilitation Program, which contains a 20-bed facility for veterans.

*Anchorage First Lady Military and Family Support Initiative* – Created by the First Lady of Anchorage, Deborah Bonito, this initiative promotes new and innovative ways for the people of Anchorage to support military service members and their families. As a “military brat”

whose father was a Colonel in the Army, the City's First Lady is keenly aware of how stressful it can be for service members and their families when they are separated during deployments.

In the initiative's initial planning stage, the First Lady and the Mayor's Special Assistant for Military and Veterans Affairs met with all the military Family Programs' offices, the Armed Services YMCA, and the Community Services offices of the Army and Air Force. The initial planning helped to guarantee an understanding of how to organize and advertise activities to reach Anchorage's broad base of military service members, a significant number of whom are members of the National Guard and reserves.

The First Lady's initiative has become a rallying cry for volunteers throughout the community to raise money, sponsor activities, and raise the overall awareness of the community to the challenges facing service members and their families. The program also reaches out to businesses and corporations throughout the State for money, in-kind donations, transportation, and other support. While the initiative is purely a volunteer movement within the community, the Municipality of Anchorage does have a Memorandum of Agreement with the Armed Services YMCA, a 501(c)(3) organization, which is located on Elmendorf Air Force Base. This organization is seen as the best possible conduit for funds to benefit service members and their families; it runs approximately 40 individual programs providing services ranging from day care to on-base transportation. In 2007 alone the initiative raised just over \$30,000 for the Armed Services YMCA.

Over the past three years, the First Lady's initiative sponsored several events that are quickly becoming annual traditions in the military community. Among these are a Christmas holiday reception, a military tribute tree, an Armed Forces Day celebration, a Prince William Sound boat cruise for 150 guests, a Halloween craft and recreation fair, a free water park day for 250 guests, and a Valentine's Day fair. Many of these events, and others, are now held with the co-sponsorship of organizations such as AT&T Alaska, the Anchorage Daily News, and Wells Fargo Bank.

While the community volunteers, under the leadership of the First Lady, do most of the organizing and staffing of the various events, the Mayor's Special Assistant for Military and Veterans Affairs provides staff assistance as required and insures that the initiative gets maximum exposure on the City's Web page (at <http://www.muni.org/milfamilysupport/>) and in press releases issued by the Mayor's press office.

**CONTACT:** C.W. Floyd, Military and Veterans Liaison, Office of the Mayor, Municipality of Anchorage, (907) 343-4641, or [Floydcw@muni.org](mailto:Floydcw@muni.org).

**YUMA, AZ**  
**Mayor Lawrence K. Nelson**

## **SUPPORT FOR ARMY AND MARINE CORPS BASES AND PERSONNEL**

The City of Yuma is home to two major military bases. The Yuma Army Proving Ground (YPG), which is larger than the State of Rhode Island, is the Army's premier testing facility. It is also the site of the advanced parachute Freefall School for the Army's Special Operations Forces and the winter home of the Golden Knights, the Army's freefall parachute team. YPG has been recognized as the 10<sup>th</sup> largest high tech industry in Arizona. It is the largest private employer in the Yuma area, employing approximately 2,500 workers, most of whom are engineers or highly-trained technicians. All of the unmanned aerial vehicles being produced for the Department of Defense are tested and evaluated at YPG. The Army has constructed two "Little Baghdad" sites to test improvised explosive device (IED) countermeasures.

The Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Yuma is home to Marine Aircraft Group 13, which is comprised of four squadrons of AV-8B Harriers II and Marine Aviation Logistics Squadron. Other squadrons include Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactics Squadron 1, Marine Wing Support Squadron 371, and Combat Logistics Company 16. MCAS Yuma supports 80 percent of the Corps' aviation training, making it the busiest air station in the Department of the Navy, and each year the air station hosts numerous units and aircraft from the United States and allied forces. During 2007, MCAS Yuma deployed personnel from MAG-13 squadrons, MAWTS-1, Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron and MACS-1 to locations all over the world.

A good portion of the base's enlisted personnel reside in military houses and apartments in the City which are located at some distance from the base. An intergovernmental agreement provides for public safety response in this area, with the base fire station serving as first responder.

Shortly after the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the Marine Aviation Weapons and Tactical Squadron 1 (MWATS-1), the premier air training group for the Marine Corps, asked for the City's cooperation in an exercise that would involve using parks, schools, roads, and even church grounds. The exercise, designed to prepare pilots for deployment, called for turning off streetlights in affected areas and allowing helicopters to fly low over the community. It was well received by the community and has continued on a twice-a-year schedule. Two additional times each year MAWTS-1 conducts similar exercises to prepare students to serve as trainers within their units. A letter to Mayor Nelson from the Commanding General of Marine Corps Installations West, Major General Michael R. Lehnert, said, "It is gratifying to know that the country can depend on the City of Yuma and citizens such as yourself to assist the Marine Corps in preparing its units for deployment."

Each year the City hosts a Military Appreciation Day which includes a golf tournament for personnel on both bases as well as the large contingent of Border Patrol personnel that live and work in the area. The Yuma County Chamber of Commerce has a Military Affairs Committee that focuses on the needs of the bases; the commanders of both bases occupy

permanent positions on the Chamber's Board of Directors and serve on the Military Affairs Committee. At the Mayor's request, the Chamber took the lead on a "Welcome Home Warrior" parade and other gestures of appreciation (special shirts and barbeque at Yuma's baseball stadium) for the first units returning from Iraq. The stadium event was addressed by Arizona Senator John McCain and Curt Schilling, the Arizona Diamondbacks pitcher at that time.

The Mayor holds regular meetings with the commanders of both bases. Over the years this has produced close personal relationships which have contributed to the close working relationship that exists today between the City and the military facilities. One example of the Mayor's willingness to work on behalf of the bases is seen in his successful effort to establish engineering courses for base personnel at the local community college and at the Northern Arizona University Branch Campus. On a continuing basis, he maintains contact with Arizona's Congressional delegation in Washington, assuring them of the support of the community for the variety of projects that are requested by the bases. Mayor Nelson reports that the delegation often relies on the City for information on base issues, knowing of the close relationship between the City and its military community.

**CONTACT:** Mayor Lawrence K. Nelson, City of Yuma, (928) 373-5001 or [Larry.Nelson@yumaaz.gov](mailto:Larry.Nelson@yumaaz.gov).

**CONCORD, CA**  
**Mayor William D. Shinn**

### **CONCORD MILITARY RECOGNITION PROGRAM**

Launched in 2005, the Concord Military Recognition Program recognizes Concord military service personnel who have served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other areas of conflict around the world with a commendation from the Mayor and City Council. Fourteen residents have been honored to date.

The commendation is typically presented at a televised City Council meeting if the honoree is home when a meeting is scheduled, or at another time that is convenient for the honoree and his or her family. The City coordinates the presentations with support groups, Blue Star Moms, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and local Korean War, Vietnam War, and Pearl Harbor veterans' organizations, which present additional recognition plaques and letters of commendation. The program is publicized in the City's quarterly newsletter (delivered to every residential and business address) and the local newspaper. The City provides a photo of the recipient receiving the commendation from the Mayor; if the presentation is made at a City Council meeting, a CD of the event is also made available.

Concord officials say the program would not be successful without the support of the Blue Star Moms and the veterans' organizations which go out of their way to make the commendation ceremony very special for the recipient and his or her family, often speaking to the recipient's military commanders to gather information about positive actions the recipient had taken while serving.

**CONTACT:** Leslye Asera, Community Relations Manager, City of Concord, (925) 671-3272 or [lasera@ci.concord.ca.us](mailto:lasera@ci.concord.ca.us).

**LA HABRA, CA**  
**Mayor Rose Espinoza**

### **ADOPTION OF CHARLIE COMPANY**

Through America Supporting Americans, a national nonprofit 501(c)(3) program that links all branches of the service with individual communities, the City of La Habra has adopted Charlie Company 426 of the Army's 101st Airborne Division, the "Screaming Eagles." Based at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, this medic unit has been deployed to Iraq since the fall of 2007. The mission of the more than 70 members of the unit is to provide medical logistics.

To support Charlie Company 426 the City sponsors an ongoing drive to obtain donations for care package items. The City provides staff to collect and package the donations and covers the cost of postage. In response, the unit provides regular updates via newsletters, pictures, and cards that are shared with the community on the City's Web site. The Mayor reports that the community's response to this program has been extremely positive.

**CONTACT:** Laura Lopez, Administrative Coordinator, City of La Habra, (562) 905-9703 or [laural@lahabracity.com](mailto:laural@lahabracity.com).

**LAGUNA NIGUEL, CA**  
**Mayor Paul Glaab**

### **MILITARY SUPPORT COMMITTEE AND FOUNDATION**

On June 3, 2003 the Laguna Niguel City Council adopted the USS McClusky, FFG 41, homeported in San Diego. The adoption of the McClusky, with its crew of 208, was the City's first step in providing effective and meaningful support to the crew and their families when the ship is at home or deployed.

What started as a City Council vision involving minimal staff support has grown into a full-scale community operation that has resulted in the adoption of a second military unit – the U.S. Marine Corps First Battalion, Fourth Marines (Camp Pendleton) – the formation of a 15-member Military Support Committee, the creation of the Laguna Niguel Military Support Foundation, and more recently, the establishment of a Sister-City relationship with Al Qaim, Iraq.

The Military Support Committee was established to sustain and enhance relations with the McClusky and the Marine unit, the "1/4." Its responsibilities include maintaining continuous communication and contact between the City and representatives of both military units; determining support needs of the personnel and families; planning, organizing and conducting

programs and special events; and soliciting and raising private funds and donations to support both units. Maintaining and enhancing relations with both units during frequent changes of command is a challenge that must be met.

The level of support to each unit can vary greatly, depending on their needs and requirements. The Committee has supported troops on the front lines by sending letters, cards, care packages, and soccer equipment (balls, uniforms, pumps and nets); it has organized toy drives, welcome home parties, picnics, and fundraisers, and has provided financial assistance to military families when needed.

Perhaps the most innovative support effort came in late 2007 when the City worked through Sister Cities International to establish a Sister City relationship with Al Qaim, Iraq. In Spring 2007, the 1/4, under the command of Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Jason Q. Bohm, was deployed to Iraq. Much of the unit's mission there involved building relationships with local governments and the citizenry of Al Qaim. Lieutenant Colonel Bohm requested that the City establish the formal Sister City relationship with Al Qaim, making Laguna Niguel one of the few U.S. cities to have a relationship with a city in this region. The City's Military Support Committee sent hundreds of soccer balls, uniforms, and air pumps to help the 1/4 build relations with the Al Qaim citizens. According to Lieutenant Colonel Bohm, the City played an extremely important role in assisting the 1/4 in accomplishing its mission.

During the start-up of their military support activities, Laguna Niguel officials were challenged by the need to clearly differentiate between support requests that could be met using public funds and requests that could be supported by private donations only. They also had to establish procedures for accepting private donations made payable to a public agency; this led to the formation of the Laguna Niguel Military Support Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization now responsible for raising funds to support both the McClusky and the 1/4.

**CONTACT:** Mayor Paul G. Glaab, City of Laguna Niguel, (949) 362-4376 or [pglaab@ci.laguna-niguel.ca.us](mailto:pglaab@ci.laguna-niguel.ca.us), or Pauline Colvin, Executive Secretary, City of Laguna Niguel, (949) 362-4376 or [pcolvin@ci.laguna-niguel.ca.us](mailto:pcolvin@ci.laguna-niguel.ca.us).

**TEMECULA, CA**  
**Mayor Michael S. Naggar**

#### **MILITARY SUBCOMMITTEE/ADOPTION OF USS REAGAN**

The City of Temecula, located 60 miles north of San Diego and adjacent to the back gate of a major Marine Corps base, Camp Pendleton, is home to a large population of military families. The City Council has created a Military Ad-Hoc Subcommittee which consists of the Mayor Pro-Tem and a Councilmember. Subcommittee goals are to improve communications, match community resources to needs, and reach out to the service branches. The local chapter of the Veterans of Foreign War is included in Subcommittee meetings and contributes to meeting needs identified. Local business leaders who may be able to assist in fund raising activities have also been introduced to the Subcommittee.

The City has formally adopted the crew of the USS Ronald Reagan and the members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Battalion. The crew of the Reagan has adopted the City's Sports Park as their official park and has volunteered to contribute to its maintenance and upkeep. Members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Battalion have provided Marine color guards for ceremonies at various City events.

The City is meeting with the Temecula Valley Chamber of Commerce to explore creation of a business support program for family members of deployed service members. In the early stages of development, the program would provide families with business contacts to ensure they receive quality services at reasonable prices.

**CONTACT:** Grant Yates, Deputy City Manager, City of Temecula, (951) 506-5100 or [Grant.Yates@cityoftemecula.org](mailto:Grant.Yates@cityoftemecula.org).

**COLORADO SPRINGS, CO**  
**Mayor Lionel Rivera**

**LEADERSHIP PARTNERSHIPS/  
SUPPORT FOR SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS**

Colorado Springs is home to five military installations and several joint or major military commands – Fort Carson, Peterson and Schriever Air Force Bases, NORAD, and the Air Force Academy, among them – and Mayor Rivera is proud of the City's long history of excellent relations with these installations and strong support for their personnel. The City participates in monthly Area Chiefs of Staff meetings in which senior elected and appointed officials of local governments and senior installation commanders discuss issues of mutual interest. The goal is to identify concerns and actions to address them in a timely manner. Security, land use compatibility, law enforcement, and various mutual aid programs are among the issues discussed.

The City has also taken the lead in establishing Local Leadership Task Force meetings with each installation. In these meetings, management and staff of departments such as planning and public works identify issues and take action on them; examples of actions taken include planning, funding, and constructing improved access to installations; resolving land use compatibility issues that could affect an installation's mission or security; and assisting bases in planning for expansions resulting from Base Relocation and Closing Commission and Department of Defense decisions to add missions to them.

“Home Front Cares” is a program started by community volunteers shortly after Operation Iraqi Freedom began to raise private funds for various forms of assistance to service members and their families. This may take the form of emergency help (cash or goods and service), assistance with utility bills, and assistance with travel and incidental costs incurred by families visiting wounded service members. The program aids service members and veterans with housing and vehicle adaptations needed to enable them to improve their lives. Since its

launch in 2003, the program has provided more than \$1.1 million in grants to service members' families.

Local health care organizations have teamed with military medical units to provide mental health services to military personnel and their families. Veteran's Family Services: OIF/OEF has focused on treating victims of Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and helping families learn to cope with PTSD and traumatic brain injury. State legislation passed in 2007 has produced additional funding for delivery of these services.

**CONTACT:** Mayor Lionel Rivera, City of Colorado Springs, (719) 385-5453 or [lriviera@springsgov.com](mailto:lriviera@springsgov.com).

**POCATELLO, ID**  
**Mayor Roger W. Chase**

### **SUPPORT FOR DEPLOYED EMPLOYEES, SPOUSES, FAMILIES**

Since 2004, the City of Pocatello has implemented and covered the costs of three major programs in support of military personnel and their families.

***Wage/Benefit Program for Deployed Employees*** – In 2004, three City employees were called to serve in Iraq with National Guard and reserve units. When the City was notified of their deployment, the Mayor and City Council felt it was necessary to do more than was required under federal employment laws. To show their support for the three men and their families, the Mayor and Council decided to continue their City insurance benefits and to alleviate the gap between their military pay and City wages. The Human Resources Department coordinated the new Wage/Benefit Program for Deployed Employees with the servicemen and their families and continues to oversee the program for the additional employees who have since deployed to Iraq.

City officials want employees to be able to serve their country without having to worry about the health and financial wellbeing of their families at home. The challenge is funding wages and benefits for deployed employees plus the additional pay of temporary employees, and it is necessary for the departments affected to readjust their budgetary priorities to make funds available.

***Spouse Support Program*** – In recognition of the fact that some Pocatello citizens serving in the military in Iraq and other parts of the world may not return to their families, the Mayor and Council wanted to be prepared to assist surviving spouses. It was determined that, while there are many issues a surviving spouse would need to manage, one of the spouse's major household costs – utilities – would be paid by the City for up to three months. Under the Spouse Support Program that was created, the cost of water, sewer, and garbage services – a minimum of \$45 per month – is to be paid out of the appropriate department budget. The Mayor's Office oversees this program and will make all necessary budget adjustments to ensure the assistance is available when needed.

To honor the soldier and family in the event of a death, the Mayor will also issue a news release announcing that flags at City facilities will be flown at half-staff for a 48-hour period following the return of the soldier's body. Two soldiers from Pocatello have been killed in the line of duty since this program was created, but neither had a spouse in the City to benefit from this program.

***Recreation for Military Families*** – In response to requests from military families and the Idaho Army National Guard Family Support Group in 2004, the Mayor and Council allow military personnel to use the indoor Community Recreation Center (CRC) at no cost, and family members accompanying them to be charged the minimum daily admission rate. The request came shortly after the members of the 116th Cavalry Brigade of the Idaho Army National Guard returned home from their training at Fort Bliss, Texas. Their families felt that use of the CRC would help them continue their physical training before deployment.

The Family Support Group also requested the use of the outdoor Ross Park Aquatic Complex (RPAC) as a distraction for families during the summer of 2004. The Mayor and Council authorized a once-a-month "military family night" on which families of military personnel pay half-price for admission. Each member of a military family is issued a military identification card, so verification of eligibility for half-price admission is simple. City officials report that this program has not been utilized to the extent they had expected.

**CONTACT:** Anne Nichols, Assistant to the Mayor, City of Pocatello, (208) 234-6163 or [anichols@pocatello.us](mailto:anichols@pocatello.us).

**PALATINE, IL**  
**Mayor Rita Mullins**

### **YELLOW RIBBON SUPPORT GROUP**

The Yellow Ribbon Support Group (YRSG), a small grassroots organization founded in April 2003, is sponsored by the Palatine Police Department and works out of a task force room provided by the Village of Palatine. To date, the area volunteers comprising YRSG have sent over 10,400 care packages to U.S. military troops on active duty overseas. Their goal is to contribute to their comfort and survival in the hot, arid areas in which they are serving. The majority of the donations included in the packages come from churches, schools, scouting organizations, manufacturers, and civic groups.

"Operation Cookie Drop," initiated this year by YRSG, resulted in the sale and donation of over 6,200 boxes of Girl Scout cookies for inclusion in the packages. Also included in each package is an eight-inch teddy bear which a service member can give to a local Iraqi or Afghani child to promote good will. YRSG leaders say they have received many letters and e-mails describing how gifts of these teddy bears have aided the troops – sometimes in the form of warnings from local residents concerning the presence of insurgents in their areas.

The YRSG conducts package campaigns at local churches of all denominations, offering congregation members an opportunity to support the troops by taking the mail-ready boxes to their local post offices and mailing them at a personal cost of \$9.80 per box. YRSG leaders say the evidence that these package campaigns and mailings meet the needs of the troops is contained in the letters and photos from the troops that are exhibited on the group's Web site – [www.yellowribbonSG.org](http://www.yellowribbonSG.org). The group's mission statement and vision statement are also on this site.

The YRSG founders and approximately 30 volunteers average more than 6,000 hours yearly in assembling the care packages, hosting various groups at the YRSG workroom, conducting package campaigns at churches and festivals, and picking up donations from various locations. Over 175 members of Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops have helped to prepare the boxes for the service members and, in so doing, have earned community service points required for merit badges. Eleven classes of Confirmation candidates who helped prepare boxes also earned their required community service hours.

The YRSG has also brought numerous military families together with the goal of gaining support and strength from one another during the overseas deployment of their family members.

The work of the YRSG has earned the group many awards, among them: the Governor's Hometown Award in 2005 for work with the youth of the community; an Award of Recognition from the local branch of the Daughters of the American Revolution for support of the military forces serving overseas; Senate Recognition from the State of Illinois 94<sup>th</sup> General Assembly for support of the troops overseas; and numerous Certificates of Recognition, proudly displayed in the YRSG workroom, from military units and commands in Iraq and Afghanistan. The YRSG has also received seven American flags carried by pilots during missions flown over Iraq and Afghanistan.

**CONTACT:** Richard and Patricia McCoy, Founders and Coordinators, Yellow Ribbon Support Group, (847) 359-2429 or [mccoy@yellowribbonsg.org](mailto:mccoy@yellowribbonsg.org).

**CARMEL, IN**  
**Mayor James Brainard**

### **COMPENSATION FOR EMPLOYEES IN COMBAT**

Last year the City of Carmel adopted an ordinance which states, "All City employees shall be provided their full City salary and benefits, in addition to their military pay, while on combat duty in Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere on and after September 1, 2007." In adopting the ordinance the Common Council acknowledged that "our Nation has been at war for over five years....City employees have been deployed to combat duty in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere....the City's policy should be to provide full salary and benefits compensation to all City employees who are serving in active combat....the receipt of a full City salary will help alleviate some of the stress and burden on families whose loved ones are called for combat duty."

**CONTACT:** Mayor James Brainard, City of Carmel, (317) 571-2401 or [jbrainard@carmel.in.gov](mailto:jbrainard@carmel.in.gov).

## **MERIDIAN, MS**

**Mayor John Robert Smith**

### **SUPPORT FOR NAVAL AIR STATION MERIDIAN AND PERSONNEL**

Each year the Meridian Area Navy League recognizes the accomplishments of the personnel stationed at Naval Air Station Meridian by hosting the Military Citizen of the Year Awards Dinner. The Meridian organization, the largest in the southeast and one of the largest in the nation, accepts nominations from the individual commands at the NAS, the Army National Guard and Air National Guard, the Army Reserve, and active duty units.

Each year's nominees are selected on the basis of the number of hours and the significance of their voluntary efforts on behalf of the community. Past nominees, for example, have been involved in the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, coaching youth teams, building ramps for disabled residents, cleaning homes and yards for the elderly, waiting tables for fund-raising events, donating time to the local soup kitchen, and work at charity golf tournaments. Each year's winner is selected by a committee of military personnel and civilians. Winners are honored by awards from community businesses and enjoy such prizes as weekend vacations, dinners at upscale restaurants, and theatre tickets.

A Blue Angels air show performed at NAS Meridian every four years receives the support of the entire community and region. Automobile dealers provide vehicles to the pilots and crews, fuel distributors contribute fuel for the show, businesses sponsor vendor booths and VIP tents, and the Meridian Transit System provide bus transportation for disabled riders and others needing transportation assistance. The 2008 "Wings Over Meridian" show was attended by 35,000 people on the first day and 58,000 on the second – this in a city of 40,000.

The Meridian Transit System runs a weekend bus service to and from the NAS to enable military personnel to come into the City for recreation and entertainment during the off hours, and the City works closely with the NAS on the monitoring of off-limits establishments to ensure the safety of NAS personnel while they are in the City. The City and the NAS also maintain a mutual aid agreement which covers the provision of personnel and equipment to one another in the event of a natural or man-made disaster.

The City and NAS Meridian have long maintained a strong relationship. Mayor Smith often attends and addresses Navy ceremonies and NAS commanders do the same for community events. NAS personnel are actively involved in community programs such as the Special Olympics and projects such as clean-up drives.

**CONTACT:** Mayor John Robert Smith, City of Meridian, (601) 485-1927 or [mayorsmith@meridianms.org](mailto:mayorsmith@meridianms.org).

**BRICK, NJ**  
**Mayor Stephen C. Acropolis**

**COMPENSATION FOR EMPLOYEES IN GUARD AND RESERVE/  
SUPPORT THE TROOPS PROGRAM**

The Township of Brick has a long-standing tradition of supporting employees who are members of either the National Guard or reserve components of the U.S. Armed Forces. This support primarily is in the form of differential pay when the employee is mobilized for active duty. Reservists get full pay for up to 30 work days (or six weeks) on active duty, then differential pay for up to 365 calendar days on active duty. If an employee's tour of active duty is extended, entitlement to leave with pay renews. Each period on active duty resets the clock for counting mobilization days.

National Guard members get full pay for up to 90 calendar days in one calendar year for both active duty and active training, then differential pay for up to 365 calendar days on active duty. Unlike Reservists, National Guard members accrue mobilization days throughout the year; all time spent on National Guard duty counts towards the 90-day limit for full pay.

Since September 11, 2001 five employees of the Township who are Guard or reserve members have been mobilized for active duty. The active duty time of these employees ranged from six to 18 months.

Since June 2003, the Township has had an employee – a Petty Officer in the Navy Reserve – serving as an informal advisor on military affairs, coordinating Township-sponsored “Support the Troops” drives and offering advice on mobilization issues and USERRA, the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act. To date, the Township has conducted five drives enlisting local community organizations, local businesses, private citizens, and the Brick Township schools to collect and ship personal hygiene items, greeting cards, and letters to members of the Armed Forces serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kuwait. Most of these items were shipped at Township expense directly through the Military Postal System to individual members of the Armed Forces for distribution by them to other members of their units. A portion of the items was sent to service members recovering from wounds and injuries sustained during Global War on Terror operations. Remaining items were donated to the local New Jersey National Guard Armory in the neighboring community of Toms River. Township officials credit their Navy Reserve advisor for the success of all the logistical arrangements.

Brick Township reports that it has received excellent support from the National Guard and the Toms River Armory during its “Support the Troop” drives, two of which were conducted in conjunction with the Township's SummerFest free summer concert series. Township officials, who have assisted the Armory with special events marking the occasions of units being mobilized and demobilized, say that National Guard community liaison representatives are eager to work with local governments and communities to garner support for their members.

When a Brick resident, a National Guard member, was killed in Iraq in June 2004, the Township arranged with the family to have a community memorial service for him in one of its

parks. A small display in memory of this National Guardsman is located in the Municipal Building. The photos of over a hundred Brick residents who have served and are serving in the Global War on Terror are prominently displayed on a Wall of Honor in the Municipal Building.

At the onset of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003, the Township teamed up with the local American Legion Post to show its support for Armed Forces members and their families by distributing Blue Star Banners to the families. Dating back to World War I, the Blue Star Banner signified that a family had one member serving overseas; additional stars represented more than one member serving. The Township has also offered free beach badges for use at its three Atlantic Ocean beaches to active service members and their families.

**CONTACT:** Bryan J. Dickerson, Office of the Township Clerk and Religious Program Specialist 2<sup>nd</sup> Class (Fleet Marine Force), U.S. Navy (Reserve Component), (732) 262-1010 or [bdickerson@twp.brick.nj.us](mailto:bdickerson@twp.brick.nj.us).

**ALBUQUERQUE, NM**  
**Mayor Martin Chavez**

#### **POLICE ACADEMY EXCHANGE AND POLICE RECRUITING PROGRAMS**

The Albuquerque Police Department has experienced a significant decline in the numbers of applicants over the past five years and recognizes that the ongoing military conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq have been major contributing factors in this decline. The military services have recruited heavily from the same demographic base as American law enforcement, and involuntary “stop loss” programs, increasing bonus pay, and tax benefits of service have reduced the number of individuals leaving the military and applying for law enforcement jobs.

The Police Department has responded to this situation in several ways. First has been the development and implementation of the Kirtland Air Force Base Security Forces/APD Academy Exchange Program, which permits qualified members of the Air Force Security Forces to attend the Albuquerque Police Academy and receive, upon successful completion, New Mexico law enforcement certification. Because the goal is to persuade these already-qualified candidates to seek employment with APD upon completion of their military service requirement, the program is limited to military personnel with two years or less remaining on their enlistment.

The Police Department has also developed liaisons with the Military Transitional Assistance Program Service (TAPS) in all military installations considered out-processing centers. The APD recruiting staff has established programs at the U.S. Army’s Fort Bliss, Texas and Fort Carson, Colorado; at the U.S. Marine Corps’ Camp Pendleton and Twenty-nine Palms in California; at the U.S. Naval Air Station, Miramar, and Amphibious Base, Coronado Island, California; and the U.S. Air Force base on Okinawa, Japan. APD works closely with TAPS personnel, advertising and hosting testing and other employment activities on bases and attending job fairs.

The APD also advertises in military magazines and Internet publications, contributing stories and advertising revenue to publications, such as *G.I. Jobs*, that are distributed worldwide to American service members.

The Police Department's overall strategy has been made possible through the efforts of the APD Recruiting Team and other department personnel whose military reserve experience has helped open the doors at military facilities. These individuals have provided the team with instant credibility at these facilities, and with service members contemplating a civilian law enforcement career.

**CONTACT:** Richard Kennedy, Deputy Director, Environmental Health Department, City of Albuquerque, (505) 768-2625 or [RKennedy@cabq.gov](mailto:RKennedy@cabq.gov).

**GRAND FORKS, ND**  
**Mayor Michael R. Brown**

### **SUPPORT FOR AIR FORCE BASE AND MILITARY COMMUNITY**

Grand Forks has a history of strong support for and partnership with the Grand Forks Air Force Base, 319<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Wing, and other military installations within the community.

“Operation Enduring Friendship” was launched through the combined efforts of the University of North Dakota, the Grand Forks and East Grand Forks Chambers of Commerce, and the Air Force base. Through this program, thousands of complimentary tickets to University events such as football, basketball, and hockey games and theater arts productions were provided to service members and their families. In the fall of 2003, the North Valley Arts Council joined the program to coordinate free tickets to numerous local arts programs.

The Chamber of Commerce spearheads the Military Affairs Committee, the Golden Eagle Club, the Commander's Club, and the Honorary Commander program.

The Military Affairs Committee encourages and maintains strong relationships between the community and area military installations. It has been active since the 1950s and currently boasts 60 members from the public and private sectors. In addition to the Air Force base, the committee focuses on local installations such as the North Dakota National Guard, the University of North Dakota Air Force and Army ROTCs and the Junior ROTC.

The Golden Eagle and the Commander's Club provide resources to support and demonstrate appreciation for the men and women serving the Greater Grand Forks military community. There are currently 100 Chamber businesses and individuals who contribute time and funding each year to ensure this mission can be met. The Golden Eagle club helps to enrich relations between local residents and businesses and the military community. It assists with efforts to retain the Air Force base, the North Dakota Army National Guard, and ROTC programs, and carries out programs to help ensure that military personnel and their family members have a positive, memorable, and rewarding experience with the local community

during their tour of duty. In 2006, \$40,000 was spent for dozens of activities and events including a military appreciation day, an Airman Leadership School, Airmen Against Drunk Driving, annual and quarterly awards programs, ROTC scholarships, and a variety of social events.

The Honorary Commander Program, which pairs community leaders with Air Force base commanders, is designed to educate the community on daily operations at the Air Force base, and to educate base personnel on the community. Honorary Commanders are inducted annually at the Golden Eagle Club-sponsored Winter Bash.

**CONTACT:** Pete Haga, Community/Government Relations Officer, City of Grand Forks, (701) 746-2608 or [PHaga@grandforksgov.com](mailto:PHaga@grandforksgov.com).

**COLUMBUS, OH**  
**Mayor Michael B. Coleman**

### **SUPPORT FOR EMPLOYEES IN MILITARY, VETERANS, FAMILIES**

On April 22, 2004 an Executive Order issued by Mayor Michael B. Coleman announced Directives on Identifying, Tracking, Monitoring and Assisting Military Personnel Employed by the City of Columbus. As City employees were being called into active military duty through the National Guard and reserves, Mayor Coleman established a policy to improve internal tracking, monitoring, and provision of services to those employees and their families. The City's goal is to ensure the positive re-entry to the workforce of all veterans, as well as the continuity of services to employees' families during deployment, in line with both the letter and the spirit of federal law.

In December 2005 the Mayor announced the creation of the first full time Veteran's Affairs Coordinator for a major city in Ohio. This coordinator serves the City as a liaison for those who have served or are serving in the military, and as an advocate for constituent veterans seeking service from the County Veteran Service Commission, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Department of Veterans Affairs, National Committee for Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR), Department of Labor, and veterans' service organizations. Columbus is recognized as a Five Star Employer by the ESGR. This involved signing a memorandum of understanding that the City would go above and beyond the federal guidelines for the reemployment of military service members. Columbus treats service member as if they had never left, with all benefits, pay, and step promotions continuing.

The salary of the Veterans Affairs Coordinator and the time of those in other departments who assist him represent the only additional costs incurred by the City for all of its support for military personnel.

The City is switching to a new human resources system that will maintain a central database to track the departure and return of employees. Upon notification of the return of an employee to Columbus from active duty, the Veterans Affairs Coordinator and representatives of

the HR and employing departments will meet with that employee within seven working days of his or her return and provide counseling on resources available, including a “welcome home” letter; a personal face-to-face meeting with the Mayor; a “welcome home” packet filled with information on contacts, benefits and services available; the Employee Assistance Program; trauma assistance and other mental health programs; and basic provisions of the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA).

The Mayor created a Veterans Committee comprised of one representative from each City Department. This Committee meets once a month and will work in partnership with the Columbus Veterans Advisory Board, public employee labor representatives, representatives of existing veterans groups in the greater Columbus area, and the City’s Veterans Affairs Coordinator. Each year, management and supervisory training given at the City’s training center helps inform those in charge of the special benefits for military personnel and what to look out for, as a leader, in case of problems. This training has been added to all new management and supervisory training, and all new employees are briefed on the policies during their orientation.

The Mayor and the Veterans Committee helped expand the rules for veterans’ preference in City employment: A veteran with military discharge DD Form 214 (other than dishonorable) receives five points; on all examinations, 10 points are awarded to veterans with a disability.

Mayor Coleman’s Columbus Veterans Advisory Board is chosen every two years with members approved by the City Council. This board includes veterans organizations and military and civilian groups that are the voice of the veterans’ community at large. They meet on a quarterly basis and bring suggestions, comments and concerns from their areas of interest.

Operation Unity, an annual event created by the Mayor, brings together under one roof all stakeholders with interests in military and veterans’ services – federal, State, City, County, and others – so that service members, their families, and veterans can have access to information on their services without having to travel all over town.

The City partners with, and has a seated member in, the Military Veterans Educational Foundation (MilVets). This 501(c)(3) veterans group sponsors events such as the Armed Forces Day Luncheon and Veterans Day Parade and provides scholarships and other commemorative activities.

The City is part of a State Adjutant General’s initiative entitled OhioCares, a collaboration of State and local agencies supporting the behavioral health of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and their families. Columbus has an 800 telephone number that provides a “safety net” of around-the-clock behavioral health, alcohol and drug treatment, and mental health services available for military personnel and their families. This effort also works in conjunction with the National Guard’s Family Readiness Program which has opened its outreach and call centers to all branches of military service.

To address problems of inequities in employment of veterans, the Mayor has partnered with several agencies to form a “One-Stop” employment shop. An important partner in this is the State’s Job and Family Services Veteran Employment Counselors. The City is working with

human resources representatives from the area's large civilian companies to promote the value of hiring veterans. It is also pursuing partnerships with the Veterans Administration and the local Community Shelter Board aimed at better tracking of homeless veterans – including the growing number of female veterans – and improvement of services to them. Because most veterans returning to the community from prison become homeless and have difficulty finding employment, attention is also being given to development of better programs to address these problems and so reduce recidivism.

The military presence is important to the Columbus economy. Mayor Coleman has worked with the Base Realignment and Closure Commission to retain facilities such as Rickenbacker Air Force Base, the Defense Supply Center Columbus, and the Navy Operational Support Center – all major employers.

**CONTACT:** Richard Isbell, Veteran's Affairs Coordinator, Office of the Mayor, (614) 645-6504 or [raisbell@columbus.gov](mailto:raisbell@columbus.gov).

**OKLAHOMA CITY, OK**  
**Mayor Mick Cornett**

#### **AIRPORT MILITARY WELCOME CENTER**

In June 2007, Will Rogers World Airport, in conjunction with the YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City, opened a Military Welcome Center in the airport to provide active duty and reserve service personnel a warm environment in which to rest and relax during extended layovers while en route to or from one of Oklahoma's four military bases. The center provides televisions, computers, cell phones, and food and beverages, and assistance with personal needs is available from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. It is staffed by a full time YMCA volunteer coordinator and more than 50 volunteers, most of whom are retired military personnel. During an average week the center will serve from 800 to 1,000 troops.

The YMCA relies on traditional fundraising activities to support the Military Welcome Center; the Department of Airports provides the space for the center as a benefit to the community. At 750 square-feet, the center rivals facilities found at much larger airports. Although the airport has limited space available to accommodate missions like the center, it has responded to requests for additional space by temporarily allocating an additional 200 square-feet adjacent to the center.

Travel for troops can be a high-stress event. Oklahoma City officials want the welcome center to help reduce that stress and help get them to and from their missions with a sense that both their service and their community care about them and support them.

**CONTACT:** Paul Urquhart, Executive Director, Earlywine Park Branch, Greater Oklahoma City YMCA, (405) 378-0420 or [purquhar@ymcaokc.org](mailto:purquhar@ymcaokc.org).

**TULSA, OK**  
**Mayor Kathy Taylor**

**MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COORDINATION AND INITIATIVES**

The coordination of military and veterans' affairs in the City of Tulsa is handled by a former Marine, a decorated Iraq War veteran, who was hired to work part time by the Mayor in September 2007 while a student (Truman Scholar) at Oklahoma State University-Tulsa and made a full time City employee in January 2008.

A Veterans Advisory Council comprised of leaders from the Veterans of Foreign War, Marine Corp League, National Association for Black Veterans, American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Blue Star Mothers, and other groups was created by Mayor Taylor in October 2007. The council focuses on health, housing, employment, disabilities, and returning veterans; in its initial meeting, the council reported that veterans, service members, and their families are unaware of the resources available to them in the City.

In response, Mayor Taylor collaborated with the Directors of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit Administration, and veterans organizations to create a Military and Veterans Resource Lounge at the Tulsa International Airport. In addition to its chairs, sofas, and coffee tables, the lounge offers three work stations with two computers, free wireless Internet access, two printers, three phones, and two stands containing brochures from the VA and other veterans' service providers in the City. It has been used by more than 500 service members since it opened in December 2007. There is no cost to the City, as all lounge items have been donated.

Food venues at the airport offer those with an Armed Forces I.D. 15 percent off their purchases and a free drink; shops offer 10 percent off. The Radisson Inn provides service members stranded at the airport a room for a night and a hot meal, all free of charge. At the request of family members or friends, the airport will use its public address system to announce the arrival of an individual service member or Unit and to welcome them home. Since the beginning of this program in January 2007, over 50 announcements have been made. Also by request, the Patriot Guard and/or the Green Country Military Officers Association of America greets the returning troops.

The City and the VA have created "Veterans Information Stations" at local community colleges, universities, vocational-technical schools, and National Guard and reserve installations. Information for service members, veterans, and their families on employment, veteran's resources, the Veterans Health Administration and Veterans Benefit Administration is on display. The City has also created a Military and Veterans Resource page on its Web site and has purchased the URL rights to [www.tulsaveterans.com](http://www.tulsaveterans.com). This site consolidates all military and veterans resources in the City and is linked to surrounding universities, colleges, and military installations. It contains information on veterans' employment, transportation, the VA in Tulsa, the Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, how and where to make claims, and any initiatives the City is undertaking for its military and veteran population.

Mayor Taylor's most recent initiative is "Help on the Home Front," which she and the City's 2-1-1 Helpline Director announced June 18. This is a marketing campaign alerting veterans, service members, and their families to the comprehensive information, referral, and crisis intervention service the 2-1-1 Helpline makes available to them by telephone 24 hours a day. The City worked with the Helpline to develop a military and veterans' data base to complement the referral services already available in the Helpline directory. The Mayor and Helpline distributed posters, brochures, and business cards at nearly 20 locations such as VA hospitals and clinics, local community colleges, National Guard and reserve stations, veterans organizations such as the American Legion and the VFW, and homeless shelters, urging them to direct veterans, service members, and family members to the Helpline and the City's Web site.

### ***National Guard and Reserve Outreach***

Mayor Taylor is particularly concerned about National Guard and reserve forces. Sixty percent of Oklahoma's Guard and reserve forces are currently overseas; the State ranks third in the nation in number deployed – an estimated 3,326. Families of Guard and reserve forces experience separation during deployments lasting more than a year, yet they do not have access to the same resources and supports that are available to active duty families. Guard and reserve members are generally older than their active duty counterparts and so more likely to have families. If those families live far from the resources and supportive culture of the military centers where active duty families are concentrated, they are likely to feel a keener sense of isolation.

Mayor Kathy Taylor has established a National Guard and Reserve Task Force in which military Family Readiness Group Coordinators meet periodically with the City's liaison for veterans affairs to address the needs of this population. This has resulted in the development of several initiatives.

***“Operation Patriot Watch”*** – Asked by the City's liaison to name the most valuable service the City could provide to his troops while deployed in Iraq, the Executive Officer of a unit of the National Guard's 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Combat Brigade said that the safety of dependents at home is their primary concern. Mayor Taylor learned that, during previous deployments, Guard families had been the victims of crimes such as home burglaries; the Mayor worked with Tulsa's Police Chief and others in the department to develop a system to provide visual surveillance of residences of deployed Guard members. The dependants of Guard members voluntarily sign up for the program through the unit's Family Readiness Group Coordinator, who is responsible for updating the City on address changes of the families involved. (Establishing the program required a legal judgment that information on dependents' addresses is regarded as a law enforcement record that the City has discretion to keep confidential.)

Addresses are given to the three Police Department Uniform Divisions that cover the City and, through them, to the appropriate patrol officers. The addresses are also coded in the 9-11 emergency call system and are flagged when calls from them are received. The Police Department has also begun giving classes to dependants concerning situational awareness and how not to be a target while a family member is deployed to Iraq. Sixty-one families are now

receiving the extra protection afforded by this program and, so far during the current deployment, no incidents have been reported.

***Reduced Admission at Attractions*** – On the first Monday of each month, any member of a National Guard, reserve or active military unit, or spouse presenting an Armed Forces I.D. at the gate of Tulsa’s Big Splash Water Park will receive free admission courtesy of the park. Family members and friends accompanying service members or spouses are admitted for a reduced charge of \$5.00. At little cost to the City, the Tulsa Zoo offers free weekday admission to Tulsa families who have an immediate family member deployed on active duty.

***Extended Benefits for Employees*** – City of Tulsa employees who have been called to active duty in support of combat operations after September 11, 2001 now have the option of continuing their City benefits while serving. They may continue their dependant coverage for the full period of service by timely payment of the current dependant premium rate. Previously, employees could continue the dependant coverage for a 12-month period only.

***H&R Block Free Tax Service*** – The City has partnered with H&R Block in offering free tax preparation assistance to City employees deployed in the War on Terror and their families. Eligible are employees in the National Guard or reserves who will be deployed on active duty status for more than 180 days, as well as any dependant of a City employee whose spouse is deployed in the War on Terror.

***Paid Leave for Military Training or Active Duty*** – Classified employees are granted no more than 300 hours of paid leave per federal fiscal year, travel time inclusive, when ordered for training or when initially ordered to active duty other than training as part of a reserve unit or any component of the Armed Forces or National Guard. Paid military leave for active duty is in addition to any military leave for training provided.

***Tulsa Community College Military and Veterans Resource Center*** – Mayor Taylor is currently collaborating with Tulsa Community College to open a Military and Veterans Resource Center in time for the 2008 fall semester. Tulsa Community College ranks third in the State (including four-year universities) in number of service members and veterans enrolled – an estimated 600 for the 2007 fall semester. The center would help this population learn what resources are available for them while they register for the Montgomery G.I. Bill. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has agreed to have representatives present during high registration hours to enroll veterans and service members for VA benefits, and veterans service officers from local veterans organizations will rotate once a week to enroll students for the benefits.

**CONTACT:** Matt Stiner, Mayor’s Liaison for Veterans Affairs, City of Tulsa, (918) 596-7308 or [mattstiner@cityoftulsa.org](mailto:mattstiner@cityoftulsa.org).

**BEAUMONT, TX**  
**Mayor Becky Ames**

**PROGRAMS AND EVENTS FOR MILITARY PERSONNEL**

While the City of Beaumont is not home to a military installation, its residents, businesses, and City officials have had a longstanding relationship with the nation's military personnel. Until recently, the Port of Beaumont, one of the busiest military ports in the world, hosted the U.S. Army's 842<sup>nd</sup> Transportation Battalion, which specializes in port logistical activity.

The Port has played a significant role in the deployment of military operations to Afghanistan and Iraq; Mayor Ames says the Beaumont community has reached out to the military personnel coming through the City as if they were their own. Activities have involved local business and churches organizing to bring food to the troops at the Port, residents treating the troops to restaurants and invited them into their homes, sending care packages to the troops overseas, and organizing phone card drives so the troops could call home.

The City has also used its annual Christmas Holiday Parade to honor military personnel. All branches of the military have served as Grand Marshals of this parade in recent years, and local businesses have donated flags for spectators to hold. Following the parades, the Mayor and City Council have hosted dinners in honor of those who have served and are serving in the military.

When the Army's Beaumont-based 644<sup>th</sup> Transportation Unit was deployed to Iraq in 2004, then-Mayor Evelyn Lord offered words of encouragement at their send-off. When the unit returned home one year later, the City celebrated their arrival with a Welcome Home Parade in downtown Beaumont that was attended by over 10,000 residents. Following the parade, a luncheon and awards ceremony was held for the troops and their families at the Beaumont Civic Center with dignitaries, elected officials, sponsors and guests in attendance. Pentagon officials traveled from Washington to present awards to the troops and read a statement from President Bush thanking the soldiers for their service.

Since this parade was around Easter, an individual donated Easter baskets for the children of the troops; the baskets included cameras so the children could take photos. Country-western star Tracy Byrd and former Major League baseball player Mark Petkovsek, both Beaumont natives, were on hand to entertain and sign autographs.

The Mayor and Council also passed a resolution naming the Interstate 10 bridge over the Neches River the "Purple Heart Memorial Bridge" in honor of those who were wounded while serving in the nation's armed forces. An "All Veterans Memorial" sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. Southeast Texas Chapter 292 is also being erected using funds donated by the community at the Ben J. Rogers Visitors Center on Interstate 10 in Beaumont; it will be dedicated this year on Veterans Day.

The City recently hosted a group of officers of the Army's 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 30<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division prior to their deployment to Iraq. Mayor Ames and the City Council held a luncheon for the officers – an opportunity for informal dialogue and to answer questions – followed by a Council meeting in which the Mayor presented the group with a proclamation honoring their service.

**CONTACT:** Barbara Otto, Executive Assistant, Office of the Mayor, City of Beaumont, (409) 880-3736 or [botto@ci.beaumont.tx.us](mailto:botto@ci.beaumont.tx.us).

## **COLLEGE STATION, TX**

**Mayor Ben White**

### **CITY FACILITIES FOR MILITARY USE**

College Station works with local reserve units, helping them host troops returning from deployments by providing complimentary use of any of the City's large group pavilions. The American Pavilion at Veterans Park and Athletic Complex, having a capacity of 500, is particularly popular and is used by the military units several times throughout the year.

Twelve of the 150 acres of Veterans Park and Athletic Complex is designated as a Veterans Memorial. The area, which includes a memorial sculpture, Wall of Honor with the names of more than 4,000 veterans, and garden plaza, was dedicated in November 2002 to all veterans of the Brazos Valley who have served in all U.S. wars. The Mayor reports that the memorial is visited by veterans of all wars and their families and has been very well received in the community.

**CONTACT:** Hayden Migl, Assistant to the City Manager, City of College Station, (979) 764-3423 or [Hmigl@cstx.gov](mailto:Hmigl@cstx.gov).

## **EULESS, TX**

**Mayor Mary Lib Saleh**

### **R&R FLIGHT PROGRAM AT DFW AIRPORT**

Every day, more than 100 servicemen and women come through the Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport on their way home for two weeks of rest and recuperation (R&R) – brief vacations from tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. DFW is one of two airports (the other being Atlanta) that receives R&R flights. Since November 2004, DFW, in conjunction with the North Texas Commission, has been welcoming home these service members, and has greeted thousands since the R&R flights began.

The airport partners with corporations, youth groups, schools, civic organizations, religious organizations and individuals to arrange for volunteers to be present for the arrival of the daily R&R flight. Volunteers are invited to call the airport early in the day to confirm the

terminal, gate, and arrival time for that day's flight; all volunteers receive free parking at DFW. Details on the DFW Airport program are available at <http://www.dfwairport.com/heroes/index.html>.

Twice a year, the City of Euless gathers a large group of volunteers to greet the R&R flight. All volunteers are provided with a red, white, and blue t-shirt and, if needed, with transportation to the airport. Each soldier is given a "goodie bag" containing snacks and other items which are purchased with funds donated by the community.

**CONTACT:** Betsy Deck, Communications/Marketing Manager, City of Euless, (817) 685-1821 or [bdeck@ci.euless.tx.us](mailto:bdeck@ci.euless.tx.us).

**HOUSTON, TX**  
**Mayor Bill White**

### **RETURNING VETERANS INITIATIVE**

The City of Houston's "Returning Veterans' Initiative" has involved the City government and the community as a whole in wide-ranging efforts to help military veterans – those who represent the very best the Nation and State have to offer.

*Community Summits* – In recognition of the fact that too many veterans returning to the local community are struggling to re-enter civilian society, Mayor White called together leaders of all levels of government (federal, state, and local) along with military, faith-based, business, nonprofit, education, media, and service organizations. The goal was to identify, through testimony from our returning soldiers, the depth of issues to be addressed, and to gather information from experts and other concerned parties. A data base of attending individuals and groups was compiled, and committees were formed to address 1) Logistics of Living, 2) Education and Career, 3) Interaction with Public Assistance Programs, and 4) Mentoring. These committees focused on the needs of men and women returning to the Greater Houston area from Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. At the second summit, in addition to continued fact-finding, the committee chairpersons reported their findings on gaps in services. Procedures were set in motion to resolve service gaps, and methods were identified to resolve remaining issues.

*Office of Veterans' Affairs* – Created by Mayor White in October 2007, the City of Houston Office of Veterans' Affairs assists all veterans through advocacy, referral, and counseling; the goal is to ensure that neither they nor their dependents or survivors are denied access to the services and benefits to which their service entitles them. This office handles phone calls, emails and referrals from veterans and family members dealing with a variety of issues. It works in cooperation with various County veterans' services officers, veteran organizations, and community partners to meet needs, particularly in the area of Veterans Administration benefits and services.

***Veterans Resources Directory*** – The City produced “Navigating the Road to Services for Returning Veterans,” a directory detailing services available to all service members returning to their homes, families, jobs, and communities from their OEF/OIF service. It lists hundreds of governmental, non-profit, and faith-based organizations that provide financial, legal, educational, housing, transportation, employment, health care, and other services. Veterans, their families, employers, and counselors can obtain a printed directory, including a foldout wallet-sized version, or find it online at [www.houstontx.gov/vetaffairs](http://www.houstontx.gov/vetaffairs).

***Informational Expos*** – The Veterans’ Office staff organizes “Informational Expos” with representatives from veterans’ service organizations covering employment, education, housing, and other resources available to veterans and their families; these are scheduled at regular intervals to ensure that the information reaching them is current. The City has partnered with the VA Hospital and Regional Office, the Texas Military Forces, the State of Texas Veteran's Commission and Veteran's Land Board, County veteran offices, as well as numerous veterans' groups and service organizations.

***Services*** – Improved and expanded services are reaching Houston’s veterans and their families.

- Behavioral health organizations are pooling resources to provide more coverage, including suicide prevention, and grants have been received from various sources to provide counseling services.
- The community has become much more engaged in efforts to recognize and respond to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury.
- Fund-raising has provided new and remodeled housing specifically designed for seriously wounded veterans.
- Job fairs and education programs are being conducted.
- Veterans and their families can more easily find resources to advocate for their concerns.
- Veteran organizations and others are reaching out to provide mentors and peer-to-peer counseling.

Most of the work in Houston has been accomplished through volunteer time and donations. The City’s convention center donated space for the summits and committee meetings; more than 200 organizations loaned members of their staffs for numerous hours to conduct research, discuss the issues, and develop solutions. Local media partners helped share information on veterans’ issues with the public. Over \$100,000 in donations and grants are being used to print the Veterans Resources Directories and to hire a veteran to serve as an Information and Referral Specialist on the 2-1-1 Texas/United Way Helpline. The County spent \$1,440 for the wallet-size foldout directories, and the City allocated \$100,000 to budget staff for its new Veterans’ Affairs Office.

Houston officials report that the most difficult tasks they encountered involved gathering and disseminating information needed by veterans and families in a timely manner; working the larger issues that are beyond their direct span of control through the federal government; overcoming the reluctance or unwillingness of stove-piped organizations at all levels to share their perceived turf because of fear of losing relevance or resources; and increasing the quantity and quality of the providers of TRICARE, the military’s health care program for active and

retired personnel and their family members. Keys to their success, they believe, were the ability to form collaborations focused on helping the service member; to develop legislative plans and pursue them through State and federal legislators, working with stakeholders such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, AMVETS, and others; and to work with partners in the press to publicize veteran issues and event information and reach out to area veterans and their support networks.

**CONTACT:** E.A. “Buddy” Grantham, Director, Office of Veterans’ Affairs, City of Houston, (832) 393-0992 OR [Buddy.Grantham@cityofhouston.net](mailto:Buddy.Grantham@cityofhouston.net).

**SAN MARCOS, TX**  
**Mayor Susan Narvaiz**

### **SALUTE TO VETERANS EVENTS**

Over the years the Veteran’s Day parade in San Marcos, coordinated by local citizens and a group of veterans, had dwindled to a handful of entries and was on the verge of cancellation. In 2007 Mayor Narvaiz decided the parade needed new life and support from the community and mobilized City staff to revive it and make it bigger and better. The City’s Parks and Recreation Department staff and student interns handled event coordination. A committee of local veterans was invited to participate in the parade planning process and selection of a Grand Marshal. More than 100 parade entries were received from veterans’ groups, military organizations, civic clubs, bands, drill teams, public officials, equestrians, youth teams, and owners of classic vehicles.

A three-night “Cinematic Salute to Veterans” was organized and held during the week prior to the parade. The outdoor movie series featured films from World Wars I and II and the Vietnam War. The screening on the final night of the series was followed by the landing of a UH-1E HUEY helicopter in the local park.

To maximize participation in the parade, organizers offered a free breakfast on the Town Square and called on the local Kiwanis Club to organize a “Children’s Bicycle Brigade.” Free decorating materials and signs were provided to all children who participated, gifts of patriotic items were given to the first 500 children to arrive for the parade, and American flags were passed out to all spectators. Keys to a successful Veterans Day event, organizers say, is involvement of local veterans in the planning process; an early start to the planning process, because many military groups set their schedules well in advance of Veterans Day; flexible entry deadlines; and inclusion of children’s groups of all kinds.

The City has adopted a line item in the budget for an annual appropriation to fund the program.

The City also sponsored a musical tribute to troops on September 21, National POW/MIA Recognition Day. The free community concert, held at the San Marcos Plaza Park, honored a missing soldier, Private Byron Fouty, whose mother is a San Marcos resident. (She and the Blue Star Mothers of America started a fund drive to raise money to benefit troops

wounded in war and their families.) The program included choirs from various churches performing together as the Citywide Worship Band, the Heart of Texas Chorus, and several soloists. The Patriot Guard and Texas State University Army and Air Force ROTC Units also participated in the event.

Because this was the first year an event like this was held, community awareness of it was a major concern. The City advertised it in the local newspaper, on its Web site and TV channel, and in local churches. Costs of the tribute were covered by community donations and the City.

**CONTACT:** Mayor Susan Narvaiz, City of San Marcos, (512) 393-8085 or [snarvaiz@ci.san-marcos.tx.us](mailto:snarvaiz@ci.san-marcos.tx.us).

## **SUMTER, SC**

**Mayor Joseph T. McElveen, Jr.**

### **SUPPORT FOR SHAW AIR FORCE BASE AND PERSONNEL**

Shaw Air Force Base has been a significant partner in the Sumter community and a strong engine for growth and progress for over 67 years. The City and County of Sumter join forces to seek ways to support and strengthen the capabilities of the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing, 9<sup>th</sup> Air Force, and 3<sup>rd</sup> Army missions and personnel assigned to Shaw.

Over the years, the support provided by the Sumter community has built an award winning community-base relationship. Organizations contributing to the support of the Department of Defense missions and the military personnel living and working in the Sumter community include the Sumter City Council, the Sumter County Council, the Greater Sumter Chamber of Commerce, the Sumter City-County Planning Commission, the Sumter Economic Development Board, the Santee-Lynches Regional Council of Governments, the Sumter Base Defense Committee, and the Sumter Vision Committee.

Community-base coordination is maintained, and strengthened, by several groups.

- X The Shaw-Sumter Community Council provides a forum for civic, business, and community leaders and key commanders of Shaw headquarters and subordinate units. This council mirrors and supports the 20<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing Honorary Commanders program. Both programs allow the selected leaders to learn about and better understand one another's leadership responsibilities.
  
- X The Shaw-Sumter Public Relations Council, hosted by the Sumter Chamber of Commerce, helps business and civic organization staff and enlisted military personnel to develop working relationships throughout community and base organizations. The focus is on community-base cooperation on issues pertaining to safety, security, education, jobs for spouses and dependants, transportation, and quality of life issues. The Council meets

at least semi-annually, or as necessary, alternating between community and base locations.

- X The Military Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Commerce serves as the Chamber's primary liaison with the Shaw leadership. Primary responsibilities include organizing and supporting the Shaw-Sumter Public Relations Council; supplementing activities of the Shaw-Sumter Community Council by promoting positive relationships between the business community and the military; planning and implementing special events on behalf of the business community to recognize new or departing base leaders; and participating in and supporting base quality awards programs to recognize outstanding personnel and units.
  
- X The Sumter Base Defense Committee, organized under the Mayor's leadership following the 1993 BRAC, is composed of 35 members, including members of the legislative delegation, City and County elected officials and staff members, and business and civic leaders. The committee monitors current and future BRAC analysis and recommendations affecting Shaw and the Sumter community. Monitoring potential Shaw airfield encroachment and non-compatible land use near and adjacent to the base and Poinsett Electronic and Weapons Training Range is a primary task. The committee makes recommendations to improve the military value of the base and range, with a special focus on maintaining the long term operational viability of Shaw.

Sumter City and County's support for military personnel takes many forms. A few examples include:

- X Shaw Fest – The Shaw AFB open house with military and aircraft displays and demonstrations;
- X Sumter-Shaw AFB Street Fest – A downtown community celebration of the Sumter-Shaw AFB partnership;
- X Sumter County Fair – An annual celebration of county-wide productivity offering free admission for military personnel and family members.

Among other events drawing military personnel and families into the community are a garden festival, regional and national tennis competitions, baseball and softball competitions, music events, and theater productions. In addition, a Shaw representative serves as a member of the Board of Trustees for local School Districts 2 and 17.

Support provided by the Military Affairs Committee also takes many forms, including:

- X A quarterly dinner to invite and welcome new personnel and spouses who have arrived at Shaw within the past 90 days;
- X Picnics and cook-outs involving military personnel and their families who have recently been deployed;
- X Participation in all base orientation programs to introduce new military personnel to the Sumter Community;
- X A utility deposit waiver for military personnel attached to Shaw when they move into the Sumter area;

- X Military appreciation days on which retailers provide discounts and complimentary merchandise to military personnel;
- X Military Citizen of the Year Awards for members of the military community who have contributed unselfishly to the civilian community.

The committee also provides monetary awards to outstanding military personnel at Shaw, tickets to South Carolina college sports events, a golf tournament for Shaw personnel and Sumter residents, and hunting activities for Shaw personnel.

**CONTACT:** Linda Hammett, City Clerk, City of Sumter, (803) 436-2578 or [lhammett@sumter-sc.com](mailto:lhammett@sumter-sc.com).

**NORFOLK, VA**  
**Mayor Paul Fraim**

### **HAMPTON ROADS MILITARY AND FEDERAL FACILITIES ALLIANCE**

The Hampton Roads region in Southeastern Virginia holds the second highest concentration of military and federal capabilities in the United States. The Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance was created by the Hampton Roads Mayors and Chairs Caucus in response to recommendations affecting Hampton Roads made in 2005 by the Base Realignment and Closure Commission (BRAC). The goal of the caucus, which consists of the mayors of 10 cities and the chairpersons of three counties in the Hampton Roads area, was to create an organization that would focus exclusively on the active protection of the area's numerous military installations in future BRAC reviews, while working proactively to encourage new missions and federal government investment in the installations. The mayors and chairs also recognize potential threats posed to the area's non-military federal facilities and have placed similar expectations on the alliance to ensure mission protection and growth at these facilities.

In March 2006 the alliance was formally incorporated with the Commonwealth State Corporation Commission as a not-for-profit 501(c)(4) organization. The 13 jurisdictions it represents contain 1.6 million people, or 21 percent of the population of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Virginia's 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th congressional districts overlay the jurisdictions, in whole or in part, as do 10 of 40 Virginia Senate Districts and 23 of 100 Delegate Districts.

In its first two years of operation the alliance has transitioned from concept to reality, establishing itself as a regional entity capable of collaboration and action to protect, preserve, and grow military and federal capabilities in Hampton Roads. Operations focus simultaneously on action items in the near term (in the current federal legislative cycle), mid term (in the planning and programming cycle that follows the current legislative cycle), and long term (three or more years in the future). Accomplishments include the cataloging of all military and federal facilities and activities in the region, lobbying in Congress for military construction funding, base retention and command relocation efforts, and participation in environmental impact studies.

The majority of the alliance's revenue comes from contributions by the 13 jurisdictions, based on a per-capita rate of 45 cents. Additional funding comes from the Hampton Roads Partnership, a public-private regional strategy organization, and State-funded grants from the Military Strategic Response Fund administered by the Virginia National Defense Industrial Authority.

The Hampton Roads Mayors and Chairs Caucus meets monthly to discuss issues of regional importance, including State and federal legislation and other strategic initiatives. Members are the Mayors of Chesapeake, Franklin, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg, and the Chairs of the Counties of Isle of Wight, James City, and York.

**CONTACT:** Frank Roberts, Executive Director, Hampton Roads Military and Federal Facilities Alliance, (757) 664-6324 or [froberts@hrmffa.org](mailto:froberts@hrmffa.org).

**TACOMA, WA**  
**Mayor Bill Baarsma**

#### **HEROES AT HOME/REBUILDING TOGETHER SOUTH SOUND**

“Heroes at Home” is a joint effort of Sears Holdings and Rebuilding Together, the nation's largest nonprofit organization working to preserve homeownership and revitalize neighborhoods by providing rehabilitation services free of charge. The nationwide program was created to assist military families and veterans in need by making necessary repairs, improvements or modifications to their homes. Nearly 50 families and veterans were assisted in 2007 through “Heroes at Home” and there are plans to aid hundreds more in 2008. A 2008 fundraising campaign is expected to increase the number of veterans and military families who will be assisted in 2009.

Rebuilding Together South Sound, an affiliate of Rebuilding Together, was founded in 2001 in response to the growing need to provide home rehabilitation help in the Pierce County area. On April 26, more than 20 volunteers supported by Tacoma area Sears and K-Mart stores renovated a military family's home, replacing the roof, making plumbing and electrical repairs, and repairing water damage.

**CONTACT:** Amy Hoyte, Executive Director, Rebuilding Together South Sound, (253) 722-5850 or [ahoyte@rebuildingtogether.org](mailto:ahoyte@rebuildingtogether.org).