

COMMUNITY CORNER

Fort Riley to celebrate dads in June with Family-gearred events

By Col. William Clark
GARRISON COMMANDER

We've celebrated military children and military spouses already this year, and, in June, Fort Riley will celebrate Dads Make a Difference Month, which highlights the important role fathers play in our Army.

Military dads, in particular, face unique challenges. They may miss out on births, birth-

days, holidays and other milestones because of deployments and training requirements. On the other hand, dads may be the ones holding down the home front, while their spouse is deployed.

Regardless, Fort Riley and our Directorate of Family and



Col. Clark

Morale, Welfare and Recreation will celebrate these dads with a month of free, fun opportunities.

Events during Fort Riley's Dads Make a Difference Month include:

- Fathers and Family Picnic and Field Day - 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. June 2 at Rally Point Sports Field

- 24/7 Dad Workshop - 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. June 11 and 12 at Army Community Service

- Dad's Tea Party - 10 a.m. to noon June 16 at Parent Central, Building 6620

- Father's Day Brunch - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. June 17 at Riley's Conference Center

- Dad's Boot Camp - 6 to 7:30 June 25 at Irwin Army Community Hospital

Dads make a great sacrifice on a regular basis, and we certainly want to thank them for all they do as part of the Army Family. Being a dad is a hard job - and it does not come

with an instruction manual.

The month of events allows dads an opportunity to interact with their children in an engaging and fun manner while also offering classes to develop parenting skills.

Studies have shown that children with involved fathers are more likely to do well in school, have healthy self-esteem, exhibit pro-social behaviors and avoid high-risk behaviors.

These few reasons alone

highlight why it is important for dads at Fort Riley to connect with their Families.

To find out more about any of the events and classes listed above or to reserve your spot, call ACS at 785-239-9435.

If you would like to comment on this article, or suggest a topic for a future Community Corner, email usarmy.riley.incom.mbs-post-newspaper@mail.mil.

Post installs reserved parking spots for Families of fallen

By Pamela Redford
1ST INF. DIV. POST

For Beate Stephens, finding a parking space at the Fort Riley Commissary or the Exchange is more than just a mindless task. It is a reminder of the ultimate sacrifice her husband, Sgt. 1st Class John Stephens made March 15, 2007, when he gave his life in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

As she pulls into one of two spaces recently marked with signs that read, "Reserved Parking: Family of a Fallen Warrior," Stephens said she is able to reminisce in a way that makes her feel less pain than going to a memorial service or a grief counseling session.

While she appreciates getting the invitation to ceremonies for Gold Star Wives, the approach is all wrong, she said.

"(Survivors) don't want to remember all the bad stuff. (The parking space) reminds me of my husband in a good way ... a lot of people forget about the sacrifices these Families make, but we don't," Stephens said.

"Survivors are kind of like the forgotten people on post. We kind of fall through the

cracks. It isn't like we are asking for anything; it is more like there (should be) a recognition there - not just on Memorial Day. Our husbands died, but we are still here," she said. "We are still alive and an important part of the Army Family."

Stephens was instrumental in communicating the need for the special parking signs at Fort Riley - a project she started about a year and a half ago after she and her son, an active-duty Soldier, pulled into a parking space reserved for survivors when she visited him at Fort Knox, Ky.

After speaking to Survivor Outreach Services there, Stephens took the idea to a town hall meeting at Fort Riley and also worked with Army Community Service to relay the idea to the garrison for similar signs at Fort Riley. With the blessing of Garrison Commander William Clark, the Directorate of Public Works installed two signs last November.

"I don't know where (the signs) came from or who finally got it going, but I am glad they're there," Stephens said. "They help me in more ways than one."

The recently installed signs at Fort Riley have not only given Stephens a sense of recognition, but also a positive reminder of her husband, she said. Without having to listen to a speech or talk to someone about the grief she lives with, she is able to remember him and feel the Army is remembering him, too, she said.

The signs make her feel that the Fort Riley community is saying, "We appreciate (the sacrifice), and we know you're still out there," she said.

Stephens said she also is thankful for the parking spaces because they shorten her walk to get groceries on days when Myasthenia Gravis, an autoimmune neuromuscular disease, limits her mobility.

The rare disease causes her blurred vision, droopy eyelids, difficulty breathing and muscle weakness, Stephens said. Her energy fluctuates from day to day - there are good days, and there are bad days, she said.

"It's kind of rough. I haven't qualified for a handicapped space yet," Stephens said, "but I look at (the signs) as something that my husband has done for me, and I have an easier time

when I go out. I am a great believer in saints and people still being around us."

Stephens said she had an interest in seeing the signs installed not just for herself, but for other survivors, too.

"I like to get things going and make changes for the better," she said.

A good place for the next sign would be the parking lot of Irwin Army Community Hospital, Stephens said, noting that survivors can pick up a sticker from SOS that lets the military police know they are authorized to use the space.

"There needs to be some kind of regulation about who can park there," she said.

Having the new parking spaces is important for the community because it makes them aware there are Gold Star Families that utilize this installation, said Christina Gary, SOS coordinator, Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation.

"It's about educating your community. Someone gave their life and is no longer here, but the Family is ... Gold Star Families are very, very important to the Army," Gary said.



Pamela Redford | POST

Beate Stephens, one of Fort Riley's Gold Star Wives, parks in a reserved space for Families of a fallen warrior. Her husband, Sgt. 1st Class John Stephens, died March 15, 2007, in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

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