

# Family covenant affirms commitment

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(Article from the Signal Archives detailing the signing of the Army Family Covenant last year.)

Committing their best, leaders of Fort Gordon joined military communities worldwide, signing the Army Family Covenant in a historic signing ceremony Nov. 5, 2007 at the Gordon Club.

During the signing ceremony at Fort Gordon Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Foley, U.S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon commanding general, said that even though Family support programming has been in place for years, offering much needed assistance, the current situation demands more. "Today's environment of sustained combat has changed everything. Long and repeated deployments by those who serve cause the sacrifices of Families to reach unprecedented levels. So we are especially focused on them today...certainly those who have lost a Soldier, or those Families who are readjusting

their lives because of a life changing injury," Foley said.

One Soldier experiencing that transition first hand brought his Family to the ceremony and talked about how extremely helpful Army Community Services had been to his Family and especially to his wife.

"Being apart from your Family is hard so for them to take time out to help is great. ACS helped keep us together as a Family," Sgt. Edmundo Rivera said.

The ceremony included Soldiers, Family members and special guests. In addition to Foley, other guests were Brig. Gen. Donald Bradshaw, commander of Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Center and the Southeast Regional Medical Command; Col. John Holwick, garrison commander, Command Sgt. Maj. Donna Brock, DDEAMC command sergeant major, Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Clark, U.S. Army Signal Center and Fort Gordon command sergeant major and Command Sgt. Maj. Arthur Washington, garrison com-

mand sergeant major who all signed the covenant.

Commanders at every Army installation have been signing the same document and will continue to sign them during the next few weeks, to signify their commitment to serving and supporting Army Families who have a military member deployed.

The first signing took place Oct. 17 at Fort Knox, Ky., with the Secretary of the Army Pete Geren and Army Chief of Staff Gen. George Casey.

Casey said the Army wants to provide Soldiers and their Families with a level of support commensurate with their level of service, and that the covenant is in direct response to concerns from Army Families. Casey said they are concerned about funding and support for Family programs, physical and mental healthcare, housing, education, childcare and employment opportunities for spouses.

In the last three years,



Photo by Siobhan Carlile

Dignitaries capture the moment after signing the Army Family Covenant. Shown (left to right) are Brig. Gen. Jeffrey Foley, Beth Foley, Rep. Paul Broun, (R-Ga.) holding the covenant, Sgt. Edmundo Rivera, Gisele Rivera, holding son Matthew as Joshua stands by, Janice Clark and Command Sgt. Maj. Thomas Clark.

the Army has privatized and improved almost 80,000 homes on 36 installations, including Fort Gordon. The Army recently spent \$50 million to hire new healthcare providers for Soldiers and Families. There are newly-hired Family Readiness Support Assistants at units that are deployable.

Fort Gordon's Army Community Services is now hiring new personnel to provide assistance to Families of deployed Soldiers. Next year, there will be a new building

to house the Soldier and Family Assistance Center on Post.

The Army Family Covenant commits the Army to provide Families a strong, supportive environment where they can thrive.

The covenant solidifies the Army's commitment to building a partnership with Army Families that enhances their strength and resilience, and improves their readiness by:

Standardizing and funding existing Family programs and services;

Increasing accessibility and quality of health care;

Improving Soldier and Family housing;

Ensuring excellence in schools, youth services, and child care;

Expanding education and employment opportunities for Family members

The covenant represents a \$1.4 billion commitment in 2008 to improve Army Family quality of life, with the Army's leadership working to ensure similar funding over the next five years.

## Respite Care meets special Family needs

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Fort Gordon lies a few miles outside of Augusta, Ga. in an area known as the Central Savannah River Area. The installation is the home of the U.S. Army's Signal Center and School, Dwight D. Eisenhower Army Medical Command, and many commands and agencies from across the Joint Forces of the U.S. military. Military families are able to access a variety of services through the Augusta medical community that include ten hospitals and the Medical College of Georgia. Of course, Augusta is the center of the golfing universe the first weekend of April, when the Masters Tournament is held at the Augusta National Golf Club.

Pamela Rachal, Fort Gordon's Army Community Service Exceptional Family Member Program Manager, helps Families access the Army Respite Care Program. Pamela points out that in order to access the Army Respite Care Program, your Family member must be enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program. To enroll or update a Family Member in Exceptional Family Member Program, stop by the Family Medicine Clinic in Room 110 at Eisenhower Army Medical

Command on Monday, Wednesday or Thursday and see Pat Love. She can also be reached by phone at (706) 787-9300 or DSN 773-9300."

"Fort Gordon has approximately 850 Family members enrolled in the Exceptional Family Member Program," says Pamela. In May 2007, Fort Gordon Families were able to complete the Army Respite Care Program eligibility process. "The Exceptional Family Member Program Respite Care Service has quickly become one of our most popular. Approximately 127 Families used the Respite Program in 2007. Currently, 200 Families per month are benefiting from the program, and this number can fluctuate month to month," states Pamela. Families use the program to catch up on needed sleep, go to the gym, and take personal time. "Some couples are using it to be able to go out on a date to dinner, since time is hard to come by when you are a parent with a child with a disability," says Pamela.

Army Community Service Exceptional Family Member Program staff has been working hard to spread the word about the Army Respite Care Program by advertising the Army Respite Care Program in the Exceptional Family Member Program quarterly newsletter FYI and in military and civilian newspapers.

Pamela shares: "Exceptional Family Member Program has several opportunities a month for support at the Family Outreach Center.

"The Army Community Service Exceptional Family Member Program support group holds meetings at 10:00 a.m. on the first, second and third Tuesdays of the month. Monthly Special Needs Accommodation Process meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Exceptional Family Member Program hosts a monthly Parent Information Exchange at 10:00 a.m. on the fourth Tuesday." Pamela continues, "We try our hardest to be available to anyone who has questions or concerns about Exceptional Family Member Program. We want to make sure that the Families and others have a clear understanding of the expectations and limitations of the Army Respite Program.

If you are wondering if your Exceptional Family member would qualify for the Army Respite Care Program, contact Pamela Rachal at (706) 791-4872, ext 3579, or DSN 780-4872, ext 3579, or by e-mail at [pamela.rachal@us.army.mil](mailto:pamela.rachal@us.army.mil). You can also stop by and see her at the Army Community Service in Darling Hall, Bldg. 33720, Suite 224.

## Army Exceptional Family member participant shares experiences

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(The following article is written by an Army Spouse who has benefited from the support and involvement of other Families and the Exceptional Family Member Program. Her story, like that of many other Families, is one that shows the value of "Army Strong" when it comes to Army Respite Care Program services)

Capt. David Dougherty and his wife, Edith, have three children, Cole, Aidan and Brendan. In her own words, Edith Dougherty shares her experience at Fort Gordon, Ga.

When we first arrived at Fort Gordon, we were new to the area as well as to the military. It was both exciting and scary. On my daughter's first day of school, I met

Stacy Mead, the Exceptional Family Member Program support group leader, and she invited me to a meeting. I did not really think I needed a "support group" because I am a strong woman and could

handle anything, but I decided to attend anyway.

It was the best decision I could have made. It was a wonderful group of parents with special needs children. It was great to be able to get ad-

vice from parents who had faced the same adversities I was facing in trying to get established in a new area. They were able to help me navigate through TRICARE referrals and the Richmond County school sys-

tem. Since then, I have been able to offer advice and direction to newcomers.

Under the direction of Pamela Rachal, the Exceptional Family Member Program Manager, the support

groups and programs have grown. We now have regular speakers on a wide variety of important topics. We have also had an increase in recreational opportunities offered to our children. There is bowling, horseback riding, and swimming, all of which are a lot of fun for the entire Family.

These activities have been therapeutic for my daughter, who has severe cerebral palsy. You can contact Rachal at (706) 787-4872 or by e-mail at [Pamela.rachal@us.army.mil](mailto:Pamela.rachal@us.army.mil).

I have to admit the biggest godsend has been the Exceptional Family Member Program Respite Care Program. With my husband deployed to Iraq, it has been the most valuable asset to me. I am able to get competent care for my child so that I can run errands and attend doctors' appointments without having to bring three children, one of whom is in a wheelchair. The Respite Care Program has given me a much needed occasional break. I thank God that I decided to attend that first meeting.



Courtesy photos

(Above) Capt. David Dougherty swims with his three children. (Below) The Arambales Family children enjoy Fort Gordon's Army Respite Care Program.

## Manager offers personal Family service commitment

As the Exceptional Family Member Program Manager, I live and breathe the essence of the Family Covenant. I am dedicated and committed to making a difference in the lives of the people I serve. I serve the Families of Soldiers who have been identified with Special Needs, on a daily basis, I advocate so parents will know the laws so they can be empowered to fight for their kids rights, I coordinate so Families can get the services they are entitled to; i.e. one story dwellings, environmental safe housing, information about resources, grants and special initiatives, I teach, to educate my parents on the conditions they have and how to deal with them, I provide Respite, and find Respite for the Caretakers of the individuals who have Special Needs, and I mentor when needed. This program helps to support the quality of life for the Exceptional Families. The strength of the Soldiers comes from the strength of their Families, if they have a strong supportive environment, they can thrive and be resilient.

I am not reaching all my Families, I want to be able to go to different units, advertise more aggressively, and provide the same caring services, the dedication and commitment to all of our clients in 2009.

-Pamela Rachal-

