

# Poignant essays, passionate speeches highlight Ansbach's Month of the Military Family finale

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ANSBACH, Germany -- U.S. Army Garrison Ansbach closed out the Month of the Military Family with VIP cocktail party and celebration of the military family on Nov. 28 at the Von Steuben Community Activity Center here.

The event culminated a month that began with a block party and chili cook-off at kasernes in Ansbach and Illesheim.

U.S. Army Europe commander Lt. Gen. Mark Hertling and his wife Sue were special guests at the event. Sue Hertling was the featured speaker.

Garrison commander Col. Kelly J. Lawler presented certificates of appreciation to several military families for their contributions to the community and in his remarks, later, praised the military family.

"You cannot put a price on the value of a military family to a Soldier," Lawler said. "Our families are the bedrock of our lives, the source of our strength; they are the only thing that matters in a turbulent, complicated, changing world."

Next, the three winners of the Month of the Military Family essay contest read their essays.

The winners were nine-year old Arianna McCrosky, 16 year old high school student Xavier Rodriguez and 1st Lt. Stefan Wisnoski of the 527th Military Police Company.

"Being in a military Family is exciting, challenging and sometimes a little sad too, McCrosky said. "Since we are a military Family, we move to many different places. We even have a sign on our wall that says, 'Home is where the Army sends you!'"

Rodriguez wrote that each member of a military family stands up for and supports the others.

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"Our family is all the military families put together. We all have to be able to stand up for one another when the time calls, because we are all facing the same troubles," Rodriguez said.

Wisnoski, a bachelor, offered a different view of the military family, noting that all Soldiers are brothers and sisters in the military family.

"If I need that encouragement, my brothers will be there. If I need that reassurance, my sisters will be there. I know, and have known, that if I need help, my brothers and sisters-in-arms, the sons and daughters of America, regardless of color, creed, or culture, will not hesitate to offer their hand and say: 'Let me help,'" Wisnoski said.

Sue Hertling spoke next and said that when she received the invitation to the event and asked her husband if he would attend he agreed instantly.

"Thank you for supporting me supporting you," she said to him.

Sue said that military families help each other not to garner praise but because they care.

"They don't do it for the thanks, they volunteer and serve because they care about each other and bring a level of caring and support and outreach to their unit families and communities that money can't buy," she said.

Hertling then shared a vignette from a few years ago, when her husband invited former Army chief of staff Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan to the Joint Multinational Training Command Ball at Grafenwoehr.

Sue Hertling said that Sullivan delivered a message that resonated with every person in the room.

"Were it not for the strength and sacrifice of our Army families on the home front the initiatives in Iraq and Afghanistan would have collapsed like a house of cards," Sullivan said.

Gen. Sullivan was spot on with those words because no one is more deserving of recognition than our military families. And that is why I want to share with you stories of military families in Europe, Hertling said.

Hertling spoke of an Army spouse named Lisa, the wife of lieutenant colonel, who lives with her three sons in Baumholder.

She is a powerhouse of resilience," Hertling said.

Lisa's husband was notified that he would take command of an infantry battalion in Afghanistan on short notice because the battalion commander had been wounded and could not resume his duties. Consequently, Lisa's family would have to move from Newport, R.I. to Baumholder in 30 days.

Despite numerous challenges—young twin boys, a younger son who had to enroll in the Exceptional Family Member program and make his first communion before they departed, a van to sell, household goods to pack and move and Hurricane Irene heading toward New England, the family made the move.

"Lisa said that '...in the end it all worked out. It was crazy getting out of Rhode Island and many people thought I was crazy for moving the boys, and Sean was leaving as soon, as we got there, but when the Army says 'Move' we always do it as a family. There are too many times we have to be apart so if we can be together we are. I'm thankful for the two weeks we had together as a family before Sean left since he had peace of mind that we were all okay and living in a tight community.'"

Sue paused and said, "We have to preserve this."

The next story was of Nicole Harmon, a Gold Star wife whose husband was the first casualty from the 172nd Infantry Brigade in Afghanistan.

When Nicole spoke to the more than 1,000 people who attended her husband's memorial service in Germany she wore bizarre multicolored shoes--she called them her zombie shoes--because they always made her husband laugh, Hertling said.

Days later she wore her zombie shoes and an Infantry-blue dress to husband's funeral.

"We have to preserve this," Hertling said.

The third story was of a spouse named Diane and her son Ian. Diane was sad, exhausted and overwhelmed from dealing with the families of 2nd Battalion 2nd Infantry. The battalion was fighting in the battle of Fallujah, Iraq and had lost several Soldiers in combat. The toll on the families in Germany was immense.

Diane said she was emotionally spent and felt like she wasn't managing her family or the families in her battalion well enough, Hertling said. She told her 12-year old son Ian she couldn't do it anymore.

"Ian said 'Mom, we don't quit, we're an Army family; this is what we do.'"

Ian encouraged her and said that she was the best leader for the unit's families and that he and his brother were okay. He even scrounged euro and ordered pizza for dinner in German, Hertling said.

"We have to preserve this."

Hertling dedicated her final story, an event from her life, to "...the military family members we call friends."

"In May 2008 Mark returned to Iraq after R & R, seven months of his deployment down and eight to go on that super-sized deployment," she said.

Feeling a great deal of stress, Sue went for a power walk to burn it off.

As she walked a friend, Tina, drove up and stopped to say hello.

Sue had tears in her eyes but told Tina she was okay.

Sue continued her walk but then saw something unexpected, her friend Tina walking toward her.

"Tina has a huge heart but she has no room in her heart for exercise. I thought I was seeing a mirage when I looked down the road and saw Tina walking toward me," Hertling smiled. "This woman with a huge heart, this lady who hates to walk, had driven home, unloaded the car, put her oldest son in charge and headed out the door to be with her friend because she didn't want me to go home alone."

Hertling said random acts of kindness from friends make a huge difference in our lives.

"No DOD (Department of Defense) directive, no amount of money for family programs, can hold a candle to the kind of caring that comes from the goodness of their hearts," Hertling said. "They are our military families, they are you and that's the reason we are celebrating tonight."

Hertling closed with thanks and well wishes for the holidays.

"Thank you for making Mark and me incredibly proud. I want wish you all a magical holiday season and a new year filled with all of the things you do best. A new year filled with military families taking care of each other and doing it with a whole lot of heart."