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The **Guard and Reserve Support Network (GRSN)** is a Department of Defense partnership of programs supporting the needs of the National Guard and Reserve community. **GRSN** is comprised of:



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Photo by Steve Turner, Reserve Affairs

By Maj. Chris Mitchell, FEPP HQ

Secretary of Defense Ash Carter announced the 15 recipients of the 2016 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award, the highest honor the department gives to employers for support of National Guard and Reserve employees.

“These 15 employers have distinguished themselves through their outstanding support of our Guard and Reserve members and their families,” said Defense Secretary Ash Carter. “Without the unfaltering support of employers like them, the men and women of the National Guard and Reserve would not be able to fulfill their vital roles in our National Security Strategy. It is a great honor for me to recognize these employers, and I congratulate them on their receipt of the Employer Support Freedom Award.”

The 2016 Freedom Award recipients below will be honored at a ceremony in the Pentagon Aug. 26:

1. **Alaska Airlines**, Anchorage, Air Force Reserve
2. **Albuquerque Police Department**, Albuquerque, NM, Air National Guard
3. **Benjamin Franklin Plumbing**, Springfield, MO, Navy Reserve
4. **Burford Corporation**, Maysville, OK, Army National Guard

5. **Carolinas Healthcare System**, Charlotte, NC, Air National Guard
6. **Clackamas County Sheriff’s Office**, Oregon City, OR, Army National Guard
7. **Delmarva Veteran Builders**, Salisbury, MD, Air Force Reserve
8. **FASTSIGNS International, Inc.**, Carrollton, TX, Air Force Reserve
9. **Hope Valley Industries**, North Kingstown, RI, Air National Guard
10. **Idaho State Police**, Meridian, ID, Army Reserve / Army National Guard
11. **Lowe’s**, Mooresville, NC, Navy Reserve
12. **Maryland State Police**, Pikesville, MD, Army Reserve
13. **Prairie Grove Consolidated School District 46**, Crystal Lake, IL, Marine Corps Reserve
14. **Seattle Fire Department**, Seattle, WA, Navy Reserve
15. **The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company**, Akron, OH, Navy Reserve

The 2016 recipients were selected from 2,424 nominations received from Guardsmen and Reservists. The Freedom Award was instituted in 1996 under the auspices of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve to recognize exceptional support from the employer community. In the years since, 220 employers have been honored with the award.





By Jessica Knight, D.C. ESGR Employment Coordinator

When you ask employers what a National Guard member or Reservist typically does outside of their civilian occupation, many do not have an idea. The District of Columbia Committee of Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve wanted to change that.

A group of employers from the District, Delaware, Maryland, and the Virginia area took part in a “Bosslift” hosted by the U.S. Coast Guard, the first of its kind. The event was planned to offer a better understanding to the communities and businesses that are impacted by deployed employees and the role they play in serving our country.

Thirty employers met at the D.C. Armory and then took a bus to Robinson Pier South in downtown Alexandria, Virginia, where they boarded the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter (USCGC) James Rankin. The USCGC James Rankin is home ported at the Coast Guard Yard in Curtis Bay, Baltimore, Maryland. The James Rankin and her crew are responsible for maintenance of over 400 buoys in the Upper Chesapeake Bay and its tributaries, including the Potomac River up to our Nation’s capital. The employers had the privilege of watching the crew pull Channel Buoy 76 out of the water and on to the ship for inspection and maintenance. Many were shocked at the sheer size of the buoy and the danger of the Service members performing their duties.

Mark Grunberg, of Jones Lang LaSalle said, “I had very little knowledge of what Service members went through before this trip and I am so glad I was able to be a part of this eye-opening experience.”

The USCGC James Rankin is also designed and equipped to ably perform other Coast Guard missions including

homeland security, search and rescue, marine environmental protection, and domestic ice breaking. Employers also got to watch the crew take part in a small ship demonstration. U.S. Coast Guard Station Washington showed their tactics of maintaining a security zone around the USCGC James Rankin and observed them chase a “non-compliant” boat while exercising the use of force spectrum. The employers then ate an authentic lunch in the galley for a true military experience and toured the ship.

Attendees were able to witness the passing of Washington’s Tomb ceremony as the USCGC James Rankin sailed by Mount Vernon. Music was played as the ship’s bell tolled, and the ensign flew at half-mast. When the USCGC James Rankin was opposite the tomb, the guard and all persons on deck faced the tomb and saluted while “Taps” played.

Ciara Calbert, of the Society for Human Resource Managers, said it was surreal to see Mount Vernon from the Potomac and witness the “awe-inspiring formalities to our great founding-father. It was an experience I will never forget.”

This “Bosslift” included Service members from every branch except the United States Marine Corps. Army Staff Sgt. Anthony Flowers, District of Columbia National Guard, emphasized that “it’s the capacity to work together that is indicative of success, whether that be military service or civilian.” The District of Columbia Committee is planning to have an event in the future that incorporates all branches of Service.

ESGR, a Department of Defense program, develops and promotes supportive work environments and relationships for Service members through outreach, recognition, and educational opportunities.





Photo by Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris

By Staff Sgt. Shawn Morris, Army Reserve, 99th RSC

Nearly two-dozen Army Reserve Soldiers and their families met with congressional staff members during a roundtable discussion at the Westin Tysons Corner Hotel June 10.

The event was hosted by the U.S. Senate and House Military Family Caucuses to coincide with the Yellow Ribbon event being hosted by the Army Reserve's 99th Regional Support Command.

"What a perfect opportunity for Soldiers and families to tell their concerns to congressional staff members who can bring those concerns to the actual congressmen and senators," said Brig. Gen. Jose Burgos, deputy commanding general of the 99th RSC. "Some of these Soldiers recently redeployed, so their latest concerns can be raised at the congressional level to see if we can improve or add to the benefits they are entitled to once they are mobilized or deployed."

The U.S. Senate and House Military Family Caucuses consist of senators and congressmen/women who want to work together for issues and policies that impact military families.

"The roundtable with the House and Senate Military Family Caucuses gives Soldiers and their families the opportunity to speak directly to staff members of congressional leaders," said Col. Richard Erenbaum, congressional legislative liaison for the 99th RSC. "It allows the staff members to hear first-hand from Soldiers who have recently deployed."

Hosting the roundtable during the Yellow Ribbon event ensured that deploying and redeployed Soldiers and their families had the opportunity to voice their concerns to more than a dozen congressional staff members in attendance.

"When an individual enlists to become a Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine, you also enlist the family," said Michael Calcagni, congressional staff member for U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop, who serves as co-chair for the Congressional Military Family Caucus. "The families sacrifice just as much as the Soldiers – they're left behind, whether it's a mom or dad back home, to man the household."

"Over the past 15 years of war, we've gotten better at taking care of Soldiers and families, but it's one of those things where there is always room for improvement," he continued. "There are still Service members going overseas, and it's important for us to keep that conversation going and to keep engaging with those family members and Service members in order to understand what their struggles are before, during and after the deployment.

"That's why we do these events – to get a better understanding of the struggles those families and Service members are facing, and to determine what we can do as legislators to implement tools that can ease the burden," Calcagni added.

Calcagni and his fellow staff members listened to and spoke with Soldiers and family members during the roundtable, focusing on key topics such as challenges employment inequities and family challenges.

"On my first deployment, I had friends and family sending me care packages and also keeping life moving for me back home in Arizona," said Capt. Aaron Marquez of the Army Reserve's 301st Military Intelligence Battalion. "On this deployment, we prepared for a few months to get things financially ready and emotionally prepared."

"Anytime a family is going to be separated, it's going to be really quite the challenge," added Ivette Marquez, Aaron's wife of three years. "I'm hopeful that the reason [the congressional staff members] are here is to hear from the people who are closest to the issues and craft their policies around the people who have experienced these things."

The Marquez family was one of hundreds that have participated in the Yellow Ribbon program since its inception in 2008 as a congressionally mandated program designed to prepare Soldiers and families prior to deployment, sustain families during deployment, and reintegrate Soldiers with their families, communities, and employers upon return from deployment.

The program's continued success depends largely on continued congressional support.

"It's important to keep the Yellow Ribbon program going. It benefits the Soldiers, it benefits the families, it actually brings the community partners closer to the Army Reserve, and I think it's a win-win situation for everybody," Burgos said. "Hopefully, the program continues to be funded and more people participate and get the benefits that are provided here by the different agencies."

"I've attended a number of Yellow Ribbon events, so I understand what this is all about," said Calcagni, who is a Rhode Island Army National Guard captain on special assignment with Rep. Bishop's office. "It's a one-stop shop, whether before or after a deployment – and in fact for the family members during a deployment – to understand the tools and resources that are available to help prepare for or recover from a deployment."

"The idea of the Yellow Ribbon program is really important, and I think it's important that members of Congress fund it to the levels at which it should be funded," said Capt. Marquez. "Whether you're going on a deployment or your family's in the middle of a deployment or you come home from a deployment, it's really a top-notch reintegration program to prepare that family with the many resources that are available."

The congressional roundtable event was also supported by Army Reserve Legislative Affairs and Family Programs.

"Families are the backbone of the Army Reserve," said Howard Henderson, Army Reserve. "Family Programs is designed to respond, connect, refer, and provide the Army Reserve Soldiers, families, civilians, and veterans with national and local community resources. Here at U.S. Army Reserve's Family Programs, we believe that Family Readiness + Soldier Readiness = Mission Readiness."





Photo by Staff Sgt. Alex Montes

By Daniel Meshel, FEPP HQ

“How are military families affected by the challenges of deployment? To what extent are Service members and their loved ones able to maintain their individual health and interpersonal relationships in the face of lengthy separations? To what extent does the well-being of Service members and their families change across the phases of the deployment cycle? The Deployment Life Study was designed to address these questions.”

In 2009, the RAND Corporation launched a Deployment Life Study, collecting data from approximately 2,700 military families as they experienced deployment. This first-of-its-kind longitudinal study was designed to assess the impact of deployment on military families.

The findings of the study were released in 2016, presenting a series of policy implications and recommendations on improving the well-being of families as they navigate the rigors of deployment.

RAND recommends that support should be targeted based on the experiences of Service members and families, rather than their observed or self-reported symptoms.

“If we wait for the Service member to start exhibiting symptoms of their stress before we engage the family, those symptoms will lead to problems that can affect multiple family members,” said Stacey Barnes, Director of Service Member and Family Readiness and Reserve Forces Psychological Health.

“If a Service member experiences significant combat on a deployment, they should receive community-based support around the family that encourages open communication and family-based activities,” said Ida Carruthers, Director of Reserve Component Family Programs.

Another recommendation focuses on those Service

members and families who leave military service shortly after a deployment. The study shows they experience significantly higher rates of psychological symptoms and family distress.

“The RAND finding shows us that separation is a critical time for helping Service members and families transition,” said Barnes. “During the separation phase, we can cut the increased risk, improve well-being, and avoid long-term difficulties. We can do this by making additional efforts to help them identify mental health resources, apply for financial benefits, and connect with community support organizations.”

The study also recommends programs that allow and encourage communication between and within military families during the deployment. RAND found successful communication during this timeframe led to better family relationships during reintegration and beyond.

“There are a variety of programs available that help develop communication between Service members and their families during deployment,” said Carruthers. “Programs such as the Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program focus a significant portion of their efforts in helping families build and maintain positive communication during deployments.”

RAND also found the impact of deployment on teens has a recognizable impact on family cohesion. Deployments impact teens by increasing emotional problems, physical aggression, and academic disengagement, as well as worsening the relationship between the teen and the non-deployed parent.

“Overall, the policy implications of this RAND study suggest we can improve our efforts in preventing problems experienced by military families before they arise,” said Barnes. “It’s not simply a matter of identifying what kind of support is needed—it’s also a matter of identifying when that support should be provided.”





By James R. Adams, ESGR Program Support Technician

On Thursday, June 23 at 3:45 p.m., I received a phone call that struck me to my core. Winston Williams, the Alabama ESGR Ombudsman Director, had been killed in an automobile accident. Winston was a wonderful, caring gentleman and the epitome of what a volunteer is and should be. He never said “no” if there was a task that needed to be completed. Not only was he the Ombudsman Director, he was a valuable member of District 4. He also took on the District 3 Chair position when the former Chair had to leave for a job out of state. Did he miss any unit visits, Ombudsman Director duties or any volunteer assignments? No. He completed them without complaining, because he felt that he was here to serve other Service members as an ESGR volunteer. Oh, by the way, he was 86 years old and ran circles around us young folk.

Let me give you a little background on Winston. In 1951-1952, as a 2nd Lieutenant in the Army, he fought in the Korean War where he received a Bronze Star. He returned to the states after the war and joined the United States Army Reserves and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1986. After retirement, Winston focused his time on giving back to his community, at both the local and state level, and working to improve the lives of the many people he touched. He was a member of the 12th Street Baptist Church in Rainbow City, where he served in numerous positions, including a Deacon, Administrative Board member, Sunday School teacher, and President of the Seniors Club. He also served as the AARP Chapter President and District Coordinator for community operations helping organize Chapters across the state of Alabama, and, starting in 2008, he chaired the East Alabama Area Agency delegation for the Alabama Silver

Haired Legislature.

One of Winston’s real passions was giving back to the military as a volunteer. He joined ESGR in 2008, and in 2009 he was appointed as the Ombudsman Director for the state of Alabama, where he helped mediate conflicts between Service members and employers. For his work, Winston was named by ESGR as the “ESGR Ombudsman of the Year” for the United States in 2012, and for his service, was awarded a commendation by the Governor of Alabama, the Honorable Robert Bentley.

When I spoke with his family on Friday morning, they did not know where to turn. Their wish was for his funeral to be a military funeral. I told them not to worry, that we would make it happen. How could I not? Winston had done so much for ESGR over the years that we had to make it happen. My first contact was Roger Benton with Survivor Outreach Services. I explained the situation and he and I took it from there. He took the military honors side and I took coordinating the ESGR side. We requested that all ESGR volunteers wear their ESGR shirts because Winston was to be buried in his ESGR shirt out of his love for ESGR. We coordinated Jim Choate, Alabama ESGR Vice-Chair, to speak at the funeral at the request of the family because Dr. Bill Kringel, Alabama ESGR Chair, was out of state and could not attend. They requested the ESGR volunteers that attended the funeral sit on the front row with the pallbearers. He received full military honors at his funeral. We accomplished everything the family asked.

In closing, as the Program Support Technician for Alabama, I have coordinated and conducted Bosslifts, Annual Planning and Award Meetings, Executive Committee Meetings, and everything in-between. I feel that I did my best work last week and over the weekend honoring a man who asked for so little, but gave all of us so much.

