

Prairie Soldier

THE JOINT NEWSPAPER OF THE NEBRASKA ARMY AND AIR NATIONAL GUARD

Season's Greetings

Army Guard medics wished farewell in October
See story and photos on 5.



Nebraska Guard finishes strong recruiting year

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Nebraska Army and Air National Guard recruiters enlisted nearly 600 new Nebraska National Guard Soldiers and Airmen in Fiscal Year 2009, ending the year on a strong note.

According to Nebraska Army National Guard recruiting officials, the Nebraska Army National Guard recruited a total of 471 new Soldiers during Fiscal Year 2009, which ended on Sept. 30.

The Nebraska Army National Guard ended FY 2009 with a total strength of 3,783 for an overall strength of more than 99 percent.

Nebraska Air National Guard recruiters also excelled in FY 2009 recruiting by enlisting 95 new Airmen into the force.

The Nebraska Air National

Guard ended the year with a total strength of 1,000 for an overall strength of 103 percent.

According to Brig. Gen. Judd Lyons, Nebraska adjutant general, the recruiting efforts have placed the Nebraska National Guard in a strong position to continue to be prepared to support a wide array of natural or man-made domestic emergencies in Nebraska or other states while also continuing to fulfill contingency missions around the world.

"I'm very proud of the work that our Nebraska Army and Air National Guard recruiters have done this past year. Today's Nebraska National Guard is stronger, better equipped and better trained than at any other single time in our organization's history and I'm excited by the opportunities that lie ahead

See RECRUITING on 8.

Holiday on the Rails



Meeting The Big Guy: Noah Newton, 2, talks to Santa Claus, Dec. 4, while riding on the Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railroad's Holiday Express. According to Ann Newton, Noah's mom and wife of Sgt. Wes Newton, the trip was unforgettable. "It's his first train ride and his first time meeting Santa. It was awesome."

National Guard families enjoy unique railroad treat in December

By Maj. Kevin Hynes
Editor

"The thing about trains... it doesn't matter where they're going. What matters is deciding to get on."

— Conductor
Polar Express (2004 Warner Bros.)

Several hundred Nebraska military members and their family had a unique opportunity to get the holiday season started on the right foot – or rather track – recently when they were given a free 90 minute-long holiday-themed train ride, courtesy of BNSF Railroad.

Speeding along the Nebraska tracks aboard a specially outfitted "Holiday Express" train, the military families were treated to hot chocolate, cookies and even a visit from Santa Claus, who gave each child a specially created BNSF train-themed ornament.

"It's a lot of fun," said a wide-eyed Jackson McNally, 4, as he sat next to his 1-year-old brother Ashton and his father, 2nd Lt. John McNally, a member of the Lincoln-based 1167th Brigade Support Company, Dec. 4.

"It's really pretty," he added, looking around at the vintage passenger car that

See TRAIN RIDE on 18.

Air Guard support services consolidated into one squadron

By Capt. Camara Minks
Staff Writer

Members of the 155th Air Refueling Wing's services and military support flights stood before their respective commanders for the last time in Lincoln, Nov. 14, as they prepared to combine into a single force support squadron.

During the 20-minute ceremony, the two commanders relinquished command of their affected flights and retired their flags.

Then the commander of what had been the 155th Military Sup-

port Flight took command of the new combined 155th Force Support Squadron by accepting the consolidated organization's new flag from Col Richard Evans, wing commander.

Both flights, which had been standing in separate formations, were then physically combined, weaving both together as a single formation.

Capt. Pamela Geistlinger, new 155th FSS commander, then took a few minutes to address the members of newly formed unit.

"If there's one constant in the military, it's change. We hear that

adage all the time, but we must accept it if we're to remain relevant as individuals and as an organization," said Geistlinger.

The active Air Force has already completed the organizational transition designed to put many areas that need each other to function smoothly, both at home and when deployed, under a single, streamlined control. The merger is designed to both cut costs and simplify processes important to military and family members on base.

Officials say it will not affect the outstanding service already given to customers by both sections.

"For instance, casualty affairs, mortuary affairs and the family program office work closely together, but fell under different flights," said Geistlinger during the change of command. "But ultimately each area is responsible for the care of our fallen or wounded warriors and their families and will now be one cohesive team."

According to Geistlinger, the change affects 46 military and civilian personnel on the base. Officers will have new job titles, but the enlisted members will keep their current positions. Unit officers will

See CONSOLIDATION on 2.

Guard's top chefs aim at national title

By Mark Roland
Unit Public Affairs Representative

Call it the military's version of the "Iron Chef."

Competing on a grassy plain in central Nebraska while the sounds of Nebraska Army Guard Soldiers conducting marksmanship training echoed in the distance, the food service section of the 267th Support Maintenance Company, Nebraska Army National Guard, showcased their culinary abilities before a national judging panel while competing for the 42nd annual Phillip A. Connelly Award for Excellence in Army Food Service, Oct. 17, at the Greenleaf Training Site near Hastings, Neb.

Working together under the ever-watchful eyes of the national inspectors, five 267th Maintenance Co. cooks prepared a meal for 50 Soldiers in a field environment using the unit's mobile kitchen trailer, essentially a kitchen

See COOKS on 3.



Photo by Mark Roland

Serving a Feast: Spc Matthew Plantenberg (right), a cook assigned to the 267th Support Maintenance Company, Nebraska Army National, serves an evening meal for hungry Army Guard Soldiers, Oct. 17, during the national judging competition for the 42nd Annual Phillip A. Connelly Award for Excellence in Army Food Service.

Recruiter thanks Lincoln teacher by arranging trip for her, sick husband

By Tech. Sgt. Alex Salmon
Assistant Editor

Cindy and Dean Hoehne had things pretty good. "Of course we had our normal worries, but it was just a pretty easy-going normal life," said Cindy.

Cindy, a career-coach teacher at Lincoln's North Star High School, and Dean, a night merchandiser at Sam's Club, have been married more than 24 years and have two children, James, 22, and Sarah, 19.

As a career-coach teacher, Hoehne provides students with as much information as possible about available opportunities so they can begin planning their future

See TEACHER on 8.

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Army Guard company earns prestigious maintenance awards

By Mark Roland

Unit Public Affairs Representative

The old adage goes: "a mechanic's vehicle is the last one to get worked on."

Members of the 267th Maintenance Company (Support Maintenance Company) recently proved that they consider maintaining their own equipment a major part of their job when they won the Nebraska and regional Army Award For Maintenance Excellence and placed sixth nationally in National Guard Bureau's Medium Modified Table of Organization and Equipment category.

The award, which is one of the categories of the Combined Logistics Excellence Awards program, is designed to showcase units for their commitment to the maintenance of their equipment and what the unit does to improve itself.

"The AAME is a competition not

only on how units do maintenance, but also overall training (preventive maintenance checks and services)," said Chief Warrant Officer 2 KC Sohl, automotive maintenance warrant officer for the 267th SMC. "(It also looks at) what we do to make the unit better, what we do on a day-to-day basis to make the unit better."

In order to compete in the competition, Sohl built a packet that detailed the unit's combined efforts. That packet was then evaluated and scored at each level by boards that scrutinized them to determine which units best contributed to the overall Army readiness.

Just a quick look at the packet shows that Fiscal Year 2009 was an extremely productive year for the 267th SMC.

The unit started the year as part of the 1,000 Nebraska Soldiers who deployed to Louisiana, providing maintenance support for the relief

efforts of Hurricane Gustav.

Throughout the year members conducted training, briefings and certified on all pre-deployment training and assistance team requirements for the M-1 year in the Army Force Generation training model, completed quick reactionary force training, combat lifesaver course and driver training.

Many unit members also completed required military occupational specialty, noncommissioned officer education system and officer education system schools. Others completed such training as the movement officer course, hazardous material training and ammunition handlers' classes.

The unit also completed required preventative maintenance inspections, services and maintenance on their own equipment while still performing maintenance operations at the various state maintenance shops and supply centers.

That came on the heels of 36 unit Soldiers volunteering to deploy or command directed to transfer to other mobilizing Nebraska units.

The unit also spent time building family support through Family Readiness Group activities and a picnic, while also supporting the community during Operation Santa Claus and other community projects.

Though Sohl put the packet together, he was adamant about where the credit goes for the unit's success.

"It's not me that wrote the packet... I just put the words in. I just put it together. That's all I did," he said. "It wasn't me turning the wrenches. I wasn't the one inspecting the weapons. I wasn't the one doing the services."

"They want to see what makes our unit so great and I will tell you what, it's not me, it's the unit as a whole," Sohl added. "It's (Sgt 1st Class) Larry Martin - he's always

trying, he's always striving for more training and better resources. The 267th has always had good training and why... because Martin is always out there putting his foot forward trying to get the best we can."

"Same with the warrants, same with the NCOs - they're always trying to strive to put out a better product for people, for other units," he said. "It's the unit as a whole, it's not just one person."

Reflecting back on the busy year, Sohl had a personal message for the members of his unit: "Thank you everyone for what they've done for the 267th. I really do appreciate what everybody does and what everybody goes through."

"It's not just one weekend a month and two weeks a year, I think that's the time we have off, so I really do appreciate everybody's help. It was a good year; it was definitely worth writing about, worth putting down on paper."

TEACHER continued from page 1.

after high school. Among other things, one of Hoehne's duties is to line up visits from schools, groups offering financial and scholarship advice, and recruiters from the Nebraska National Guard.

The Nebraska Army Guard recruiter assigned to North Star is Staff Sgt. Joseph Strack.

Hoehne and Strack, who has served two years as a recruiter in the Nebraska Army National Guard's Recruiting and Retention Command in Lincoln, were introduced in March 2009. Strack said he was immediately welcomed into Hoehne's classroom.

"She is a big supporter of the military in general," said Strack. "She bends over backward and drops what she's doing to try to help us out."

In the past Hoehne had let recruiters from the active branch of each service into her class, but now only extends that invitation to the Nebraska National Guard simply because they don't harass the students if they aren't interested.

"The (active) branches of the military, they don't take no for an answer," said Hoehne. "The Guard has been very respectful of that."

Hoehne makes it clear if students don't show interest, but are still hassled, those presenters will never be allowed back into her class, she added.

Hoehne has let Strack into her classroom several times. She's also allowed multiple National Guard banners to be hung in the school, helped students participate in "Guard for a Day" activities where they get to speak with Nebraska National Guard members and tour facilities and equipment, got Strack on the career education board, and even had a "Number 88" National Guard NASCAR driven by Dale Earnhardt Jr. visit North Star High School.

In getting to know each other, Strack quickly learned that Hoehne was a huge fan of NASCAR and, arguably, it's most popular driver who just happens to be sponsored by the National Guard.

"You could meet Mrs. Hoehne and know within 10 minutes that she's a huge Dale Earnhardt Jr. fan," said Strack. "Most people have Cornhusker flags in their front yard; they have a Dale Jr. flag."

Hoehne said she and her husband are such big fans of Dale Earnhardt Jr. that they'd actually planned to celebrate their upcoming 25th wedding anniversary by finally going to a NASCAR race in person.

"We had talked about for our 25th anniversary that that's what we should do," said Hoehne. "We



Courtesy Photo

This Is The Pits! Staff Sgt. Joseph Strack poses with Cindy and Dean Hoehne near "pit row" at the Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kan., Oct. 4. Strack and other Nebraska Army National Guard recruiters provided the trip to the NASCAR race as a thank-you for everything Cindy Hoehne has done for the Nebraska Army National Guard as a career teacher at Lincoln's North Star High School.

should just go to a race because we'd always talked about going."

Then came June 19, 2009.

While attending a wedding hundreds of miles away, Hoehne received a phone call from Dean. He didn't feel well and was going to go to the hospital to see what was wrong. It turned out that Dean had a perforated bowel, which had caused infections and tremendous pain. His best option was surgery to repair the perforation.

The news that came next changed the Hoehnes' future forever. They learned Dean was much sicker than initially thought - he had cancer.

"When they went in, they found a mass on his colon that had already metastasized to his liver," said Hoehne. "So stage four, right there."

The Hoehnes had to rethink their entire future. With Dean now unable to work and the medical bills piling up, Cindy's income was simply not sufficient to allow them their dream of an anniversary trip to a NASCAR race.

"Joe and I were talking one day and I go 'Well, that's not going to happen now,'" said Hoehne. "There is no way we can afford to do something like that on one income."

After hearing the Hoehnes wouldn't be able to realize their dream, Strack hatched a plan to thank Hoehne for everything she has done for the Nebraska National Guard.

Strack said he and other recruiters combined the points they'd earned from www.guardmission-

zone.com - a recruiting program that lets Army Guard recruiters use points they earn from recruiting to purchase National Guard-themed items they can either give to new recruits or assist in future recruiting efforts - to buy tickets to an Oct. 4th race at the Kansas Speedway in Kansas City, Kan.

Strack then called the Hoehnes to give them the news.

"Dean was actually in the car with me," said Hoehne. "I just about wet my pants when I was driving. I said 'Dean, we're going to NASCAR.'"

On the morning of Oct. 4 Strack picked up the Hoehnes before dawn and made the drive to Kansas City. According to Strack, they began their day with breakfast at the National Guard's tent in the infield. They then toured the pit areas, garages and victory lane.

After an impressive lunch, the Hoehnes then had a moment they'd dreamed of: a question and answer session with Dale Earnhardt Jr. for the approximately 30 people in the National Guard's tent.

After the interview session, Strack and the Hoehnes made their way above to pit row to watch the race. While there they were allowed to listen to the communication between Earnhardt and his pit crew.

"The race was amazing," said Hoehne. "Joe always made sure Dean and I were in front."

"It's so much fun," she added. "Everybody was so nice. Every person that we met down there from the Guard was just accommodating

and welcoming."

During the race Earnhardt led 41 laps, but eventually ran into problems in the pit and finished in 36th position. Although the outcome of the race wasn't what Strack and the Hoehnes had hoped, Strack said it meant a lot to be able to give a special moment back to someone who has helped the Nebraska National Guard so much.

"It means everything to me, especially under the circumstances that they were under," said Strack.

"Just looking at the smiles on their faces and the looks in their eyes made everything worth it," he added. "Seeing people getting something that they've been wanting to do and being able to provide that for them makes it all worthwhile... I don't think I could have picked two better people to go with."

Hoehne said she never expected to be given the chance to enjoy a NASCAR race with her husband. She said she can't thank Strack and the Nebraska National Guard enough for that opportunity.

"Overall I would say it was an awesome day of fellowship, of racing, of caring and of sacrifice," said Hoehne. "It's something I'll never forget doing. It's one of those things I can check off my bucket list and I owe it to Joe and the Guard, for sure."

According to Hoehne, Dean has responded well to chemotherapy and much of his cancer is in remission.

"He's doing really, really well," said Hoehne. "Like 95 percent of the cancer is not showing up on any test at this point."

Hoehne remains optimistic, yet realistic about her future with her husband. She is relying heavily on her faith.

"It's in God's hands now whether our future is another two years or whether it's another 25 years," said Hoehne. "You have to live each day as if each day was your last because you never know. Whether it's me or him, you just never know."

And although Dean's prognosis is much improved, the Hoehnes have been through a difficult time since his diagnosis.

Yet for at least one day during that time, a recruiter and the Nebraska National Guard allowed them to take their minds off of life's tribulations.

The Hoehnes and Strack are now more than coworkers and Cindy said she will always be indebted to Strack and the Nebraska National Guard.

"He gave so much more to us than I'll ever be able to give back," said Hoehne. "It was a Sunday he could have been with his wife and he chose to spend it with us and to give us something that we probably would never been able to do."

Guardsmen, Reservists encouraged to nominate employers for ESGR recognition

By Steve Moseley

Nebraska ESGR Committee

Guardsmen and Reservists: Nominate your employer for the 2010 Secretary of Defense Employer Support Freedom Award at www.FreedomAward.mil.

The 2010 nomination season has begun and will close Jan. 18, 2010.

Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) is a Department of Defense agency that seeks to promote a culture in which all American employers support and value the military service of their employees.

The organization recognizes outstanding support, increases awareness of the law and resolves conflicts through mediation.

ESGR volunteers provide free education, consultation and, if necessary, mediation for employers of Guard and Reserve personnel.

For more information, please contact Executive Director William Nelson at (402) 309-7105 or email william.nelson1@us.army.mil for more information on ESGR Employer Outreach Programs and volunteer opportunities.

RECRUITING continued from page 1.

of us in the months and years ahead," said Lyons.

"I firmly believe that the Nebraska National Guard is one of our nation's premier military organizations," he added. "We offer something that no other military service can: the opportunity and responsibility to serve our state and nation. We continue to look for men and women interested in joining our ranks and becoming part of our outstanding team."

Many opportunities still exist for quality individuals who would like to become a part of the Nebraska Army or Air National Guard. The Guard offers a variety of benefits including money for school, competitive pay for weekend drills and valuable real-world training.