

COMMUNITY CORNER

Center eases tax filing at Fort Riley

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

With the end of the holiday season, a new season looms – tax season. Many people dread this time of year, but Soldiers, their dependents and retirees have the Fort Riley Tax Center to make filing state and federal returns a quick, easy and free task.

The Tax Center is now open for business in Building 7826 across from Balow Theater on Custer Hill.

If you are thinking of forgoing the Tax Center in favor of quick cash from a refund-anticipation loan, don't. The Tax Center can electronically file your refund. Electronic filing and direct deposits drastically reduce the time it takes to get your refund. On average, filers see their refunds in less than a week.

Instant rebates offered by most commercial tax services are nothing more than loans with incredibly high interest rates. In fact, in 2006, the Department of Defense published a regulation protecting Soldiers from these expensive refund anticipation loans. In addition to increased disclosure requirements, fee-based tax preparation companies may not charge in excess of 36 percent interest for these loans.

If you prepare your taxes on your own, bring them into the Tax Center. One of the certified tax preparers will check over your state and federal returns to make sure you've got it correct. If the IRS questions your taxes, the Tax Center can provide help.

The Tax Center is just one more service provided at Fort Riley to help ease the burden on Soldiers and Family members.

Last year, the Fort Riley Tax Center served its clients almost \$1 million in preparation fees. They prepared more than 9,300 federal and state returns and were able to obtain more than \$12 million in refunds.



Col. Brown

W-2s for active duty Soldiers will be available on myPay. Call the Tax Center now at 785-239-1040 to set up an appointment. Hours are from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on

Saturday. Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments are encouraged.

Along with all of your W-2 forms, be sure to bring the following items – if applicable – with you when you head to the Tax Center:

- Social Security Card – required for everyone, including children
- Power of attorney
- All 1099-R Forms – Pension and Retirement
- All 1099-INT Forms – Interest Income Statement
- All 1099-DIV Forms – Dividend Income Statement
- Form 1098 – Mortgage Interest Statement
- Form 1098-E – Student Loan Interest Statement
- HUD-1 Forms for those who have purchased or sold a home in 2009

- Bank routing and account numbers
- Receipts for deductible expenses
- 2008 Tax return
- Form 8332 signed by custodial parent if a non-custodial parent is claiming a child exemption

The Tax Center will be open through April, but why wait? Gather your forms and make your appointment today.

If you would like to comment on this article or suggest a topic for the Community Corner, e-mail rick.post.newspaper@coms.army.mil.

Each delegate injects unique perspective into AFAP

By Rob McIvaine
FMWRC

ARLINGTON, Va. – Spouses, Soldiers, retirees and volunteers all brought unique qualifications and perspectives to the Army Family Action Plan work group sessions as they worked on issues to improve the Army quality of life.

The 12 members of the Family Support II working group were given a list of nine issues on Jan. 12, and were tasked to determine the two most important, then discuss how to succinctly and accurately word each issue paper.

Discuss, though, is putting it mildly. "Yesterday was intense," Sue Carter, room facilitator, said to the team. "Our responsibility is to help people understand about these not-so-apparent issues and make sure our messages are being received."

Carter has many years experience as a facilitator at AFAP conferences. As a former Army spouse, an Army Community Service employee, and a volunteer who now works with 1st Army Division East and Family Readiness Group programs at Fort Meade, Md., she was selected by her garrison to participate in this year's AFAP.

"Each of you has something different to add because of your experience," she

told her work group.

The power of the AFAP process comes from having such diverse experience in one place, Carter said. Before the group were two issues: No. 39, FRG fundraising restrictions, and No. 61, funding for Army Reserve FRGs.

Each of those issues has far too many facets for a one-page position paper to cover it all – so the challenge was to say enough to be clear about the problem, yet still leave room to allow for a creative solution.

"For example, for both the National Guard and the Army Reserve, there's no way for donations over \$1,000 to find its way to FRGs, as there is for the active Army where the donations are managed by the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation through the Army Community Service," said Pete Hepp, FMWRC Family programs.

Currently, as stipulated in Army Regulation 608-1, Appendix J, external fund raising and solicitation of gifts and donations is restricted.

"In other words," said Carter, "FRGs could be selling cookies and brownies just inside the gate of a Reserve Center, National Guard Armory or a military installation and a passersby can't buy it. What's more, FRG volunteers become exhausted during any fund raising activ-

ity and often don't have the energy to focus on the real mission – providing valuable information to the Family members of Soldiers."

FRGs are supposed to provide a service that "gives Families what they need before they need it," Carter emphasized, not focus on raising funds.

The working group was pulling together, debating sentence structure or flow of wording to enhance understanding, trying to state in a single page the frustration FRG leaders face because of policy and regulation limitations. Their passion took many forms, because most of them have lived through the problem in various ways during the past few years.

Patti Elliott is a member of the North Carolina chapter of the Blue Star Mothers of America, Inc. To raise awareness of their sons and daughters continuing to serve in the military, they started the "Not Forgotten Bracelets" donations project.

"Each of our bracelets is handmade by a North Carolina Blue Star mother with love," Elliott said. "The money donated for the bracelet will be used to honor our military personnel in North Carolina."

Ken Kraft of Oregon, besides raising Wensleydale sheep and Papillons on his

Timber Creek Farms, also raises Victorian bulldogs.

"These are the healthy bulldogs," Kraft smiled. "They are the bulldog of the 1700s, raised to be consistently bulky, with great temperament, loyalty and outstanding health."

His passion runs deeper for veterans. Over the past three years, Kraft's farm has given about 30 bulldogs to wounded warriors.

"It's an amazing thing to witness how the Victorian bulldog takes to a wounded warrior who has (post traumatic stress disorder) or bad injury," Kraft said.

Both Kraft and Elliott struggled to focus on the big picture, as their perception of the problem was filtered by their individual experiences with donation laws.

Carey Quick saw the issue as a Soldier's wife, a Soldier, and the mother of four children, one of whom is getting married, but not until her father returns from Iraq.

"I'm in the Texas National Guard," Quick explained, "and right now I'm waiting on a phone call from my husband," she said. Her phone buzzed and she ran out the door during a 10-minute break, only to return and quickly get

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AFAP leader feels, sees passion for making an impact

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Army spouse Bobbie Hanlon is passionate about the Army Family Action Plan because she knows first-hand how the AFAP process can make a difference in the lives of Soldiers and Families.

That's because Hanlon has seen an issue she worked on as an AFAP delegate 11 years ago become a standard practice.

A facilitator at this year's AFAP Conference, Hanlon believed the same passion for making an impact motivated the Family Support working group she led. "The people in my group really feel the effects of repeated deployments on Army Families," she explained. "They know their work at the conference is important and makes a difference."

The 11 members of Hanlon's Fam-

ily Support working group were Soldiers from the active and reserve components, Army spouses and Army civilian employees. The mother of three and a Fort Riley Family readiness support assistant, Hanlon is an Army spouse of 19 years whose husband is deployed to Iraq. During the five-day conference, her job was to help her group develop recommendations on two issues: access for Reserve Soldiers to the Exceptional Family Member Program, and 24/7 child care on installations when a need is established by mission commanders.

"My working group evaluated 10 Family Support issues and chose to develop recommendations on these two issues for consideration by the AFAP Conference as a whole," Hanlon said. "The common theme for my group in select-

ing the EFMP and 24/7 child care issues is their deep desire to help Families with children who are feeling the impacts of deployments. My group members are just like me – they want to see their recommendations considered by our leadership and ultimately come to fruition."

At the conclusion of the AFAP Conference, the "Top 5" issues and recommendations of eight working groups were forwarded to Headquarters Department of the Army for attention. "That's the value of AFAP," Hanlon noted. "It's an opportunity to provide input to our leaders by identifying and prioritizing the issues that make a difference in the lives of our Soldiers and Families."

After 11 years of participating in AFAP, Hanlon said she has not seen a drop in the enthusiasm for the program.

In fact, she said, the spirit of supporting Soldiers and Families was stronger than ever. "I've never seen a working group so engaged, outspoken and passionate about their work on behalf of Army Families as my group is this year," she said.

The change Hanlon helped make possible – and is so understandably proud of – when she was a first-time AFAP delegate is on regular display at military funerals. Thanks to the passion of her AFAP working group 11 years ago, a bugler is present to sound taps when a veteran is laid to rest in a military cemetery.

Read more about the AFAP Conference on the Installation Management Command's blog at <http://usarmymimcom.blogspot.com>.

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