

COMMUNITY CORNER

AER Campaign kicks off to raise emergency funds for Soldiers, Families

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

Fort Riley's Soldiers will be asked to open their hearts and their wallets through May 15 for the 2011 Army Emergency Relief campaign. This annual fundraiser is unique because those who give money are helping their fellow Soldiers, Family members and retirees right here in the Central Flint Hills Region.

Our Soldiers and their Families are feeling the pressures of deployments. As a post, we're moving at much speed in several different directions to do our part in overseas operations. Add to that strain the cost of fuel, insurance and a host of other financial costs, and before long, a

normally stable household may be living paycheck-to-paycheck. One unforeseen financial emergency can be devastating for many of our individual Soldiers, as well as those with Families. That's where Fort Riley's AER program can help.



Col. Brown

This could be funds in the form of an interest-free loan or grant to help someone who may need to pay rent, have repairs made on a privately owned vehicle or to buy an airline ticket for a funeral service in another state.

There's even a scholarship program within AER to help spouses and Family members pay tuition for undergraduate degrees. This program is based on financial need, Family size and other circumstances.

WHAT IS AER?
AER began in 1942 when the secretary of War and Army chief of staff incorporated the private, nonprofit organization. Since then, emergency funds have been in place to help Soldiers at a moment's notice.

HOW CAN AER HELP ME?
AER is all about rapidly responding to our Soldiers' needs. Fort Riley commanders and first sergeants can use the Commanders Referral Program to approve AER loans up to \$1,000 in order to immediately

resolve a Soldier's financial issue. After filling out a simple, one-page application, you'll need to bring your most recent Leave and Earnings Statement to your appointment with an AER caseworker. From the time you sit down with the caseworker, AER's goal is to have you out the door with the money you need in 15 minutes or less.

If your spouse has been deployed, AER also can help you through tough times. You'll need to bring a power of attorney, your military ID card and any substantiating documents to your AER case worker appointment.

HOW YOU CAN HELP
On a national basis in 2010, AER provided more than \$77

million in assistance to more than 66,000 Soldiers and Families. At Fort Riley, Soldiers generously donated more than \$200,000 — that's a lot of money, but consider AER gave out more than \$1.8 million last year to Soldiers, Family members and retirees on this post alone. The campaign goal this year is \$100,000.

In the coming weeks, you will be approached either in formation or individually by your unit project officer. You can donate through payroll allotment, check or cash. When you're asked to give, please take a look at the Soldier standing next to you in formation. He or she could be going through a rough time, but you might not be aware of those troubles. You

may think it will never happen to you, and I hope you're right. If you have questions about AER, check with your unit project officer. If you are a Family member, call 785-239-9435 and ask for an AER staff member.

When you contribute to AER, think of it as putting aside money for your battle buddy's rainy day. Emergencies never hit on a convenient schedule, but when they do, AER will be there to help.

If you would like to comment on this article, or suggest a topic to be covered in the Community Corner, e-mail rle.post.newspaper@comus.army.mil.

Picirne announces changes to wait list

PICIRNE MILITARY HOUSING

Beginning March 21, service members with pay grades between E-1 to E-8 on the wait list for on-post Family housing will benefit from improvements introduced through a new rank band structure. These changes will result in more accurate predictions of wait times.

The new rank band program will assign homes based on E-1 to E-5 and E-6 to E-8 designation. The previous system was based on a rank band structure of E-1 to E-3, E-4 to E-6 and E-7 to E-8.

When the changes take effect on March 21, service members currently on the wait list may experience a change in their position. This change is not expected to impact service members' actual wait times.

"We are constantly exploring new ways to improve the residential experience for our service members and their Families," said JC Calder, deputy community management director, Picirne Military Housing. "There are more than 1,000 service member Families on our wait list at any given time. Approximately 80 percent are Families of E-1 to E-8 service members. This reorganization of homes and the wait list structure is an important adjustment that will allow us to better address their needs."

For now, E-6 service members have the opportunity to be placed on either the E-1 to E-5 or the E-6 to E-8 wait list.

"Essentially, when we have the full inventory of homes needed for E-6 Families, they will all go on the list for E-6 to E-8. For now, it is a personal choice that the E-6 can exercise based on their need," Calder said.

The old rank band structure was in place when Picirne, the privatized housing partner for Fort Riley, assumed responsibility for the management of the installation's Family housing in 2006.

At the time, there were 3,114 homes on the post.

Since then, there have been changes in neighborhoods across the post through new development, renovations and the demolition of some older homes. Upon completion of the Army-approved Community Development Master Plan, the total number of number of on-post homes will be 3,827.

The plan places emphasis on providing more three- and four-bedroom homes on post to help address the demand to accommodate larger Families, a type of home in short supply in the off-post rental market.

Those with questions are encouraged to contact the Leasing and Relocation Office customer service team at 785-717-2025 or by e-mail, at forttrirelocations@picirnehm.com.

Open House meetings are scheduled from 8:00 to 9:30 a.m., noon to 1:30 p.m. and 5:00 to 6:30 p.m. March 29 at the Forestry Neighborhood Center, 22900 Hitching Post Road.

Conference attendees learn about educational benefits

By Shandi Dix
1ST INF. DIV. POST

Attendees at Fort Riley's fourth annual Community Partnership Conference on Education March 1 at Riley's Conference Center learned about higher education options, upcoming scholarship deadlines and changes to the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

Nikki Crisman, assistant director for Family programs, Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, opened the event by stating the purpose of the conference.

"We're here to focus on enhancing existing partnerships — strengthen current life-long learning opportunities in the (Central) Flint Hills Region, not only for our military-connected Soldiers and Families, but for all," she said.

Crisman also said many military Families pursue assignments based on educational opportunities for themselves, their children and their spouses.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Mark Sodemann, education services officer, gave a briefing of post-secondary education options available to Soldiers, Family members and the

CFHR community.

Leader Skills Enhancement Courses are designed to help develop the skills of young Soldier leaders. On a space available basis, Family members with Department of Defense ID cards also are able to take those courses that are worth college credits, Sodemann said.

The LSEC also is open to high school seniors with a DoD ID card and approval from the high school counselor.

With more than 360 enrollees in the LSEC program, Fort Riley served Soldiers and Families more than \$1.5 million in tuition fees in 2010, Sodemann said.

The College Evening Program is available to DoD ID cardholders, high school seniors, with the approval of a school counselor, and community members in the CFHR.

"Our Soldiers get first option enrollment because that is our focus," Sodemann said.

The tuition-based program has more than 200 Family members enrolled per term. Evening and weekend classes are offered during each of the five terms that make up the school year.

Seven colleges on post offer 45 different degree programs.

Classes are open to CFHR

community members for the same tuition rate charged to Soldiers and Family members.

Sodemann said attending college courses on post can provide tuition savings. On average, the annual tuition cost savings for full-time students attending on-post, instead of off-campus, ranges from \$1,000 to \$17,000.

In 2010, college enrollments at on-post facilities ranged from 18 students to more than 2,000; however, online enrollment was not included in the figures presented during the CPC.

Besides the post-secondary education options on-post, Sodemann highlighted three campuses within a 30-minute radius of Fort Riley, including Cloud County Community College in Junction City, Highland Community College in Wamego and Kansas State University in Manhattan.

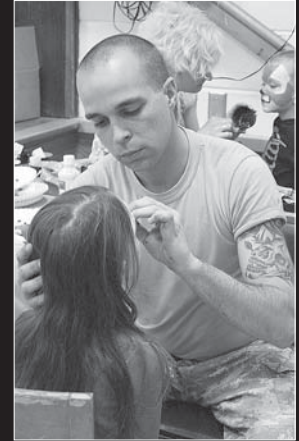
More than 1,000 enrollees on-campus at K-State have a military connection.

All military-connected post-secondary education students automatically receive in-state tuition at all public institutions.

Other programs offered to Soldiers, Family members and CFHR community members include a GED program, Su-

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FUN AND GAMES



Shandi Dix | POST

A Soldier paints a Fort Riley Elementary School student's face during the annual Parent Teacher Association carnival March 9 at the school. More than 150 Families attended the event. Activities included a fish pond, cake walk, bowling, mini golf, bingo, football toss, Family portraits, face painting and a bounce house. A concession stand was open serving hot dogs, pizza, nachos, tea cream and drinks. Carnival attendees also had the opportunity to bid on various baskets filled with items donated by local merchants.