

COMMUNITY CORNER

Commander encourages Soldiers to pay attention to finances

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

Perhaps the No. 1 financial issue the Army is experiencing with Soldiers and their Families is a result of the extra money received during deployments. Now, "wait a minute," you are probably thinking. How can extra money received while serving in a combat zone – hazardous fire pay, eminent danger pay, family separation and no federal taxes – be the cause of financial problems? The simple answer is that Soldiers and their Families are increasing their monthly spending to a level that utilizes all the extra money. They then are not able to live on their normal monthly pay once the deployment is over.

Part of the increase in spending comes in the form of buying stuff "just because I have the money" as one Soldier once said to me. Many Soldiers

have told me they were bored most of the time while deployed, but since they had easy access to the Internet and the finances with which to make purchases, they did.

This has proven to be a bad combination for many Soldiers. That big screen TV, the newest gaming system, and a hundreds of dollars worth of the latest games to play on that system seem to be the most popular online purchases for Soldiers in theater.

Back home, the spouse and Family may fall into the habit of spending in ways they normally would not, such as eating out or partaking in "retail therapy" to get their minds off the fact their Soldier is down range.



Col. Kevin Brown

Part of the overspending also is from not taking advantage of the benefits offered during deployment. For example, with three free meals a day, there are still many Soldiers who eat the majority of their meals at fast-food vendors found in theater.

The biggest area for getting into financial trouble during deployment, however, is in taking on more debt. Without a budget or plan, many of us may spend until it hurts. Soldiers and their Families are buying big ticket items such as cars, furniture and more – mostly on credit. They also are significantly increasing their credit card debt. During the deployment, the fact that their monthly minimum debt payments have gone from \$700 a month to \$1,600 a month, as an example, doesn't register as an issue because there is enough money at that time to pay each debt.

Once the deployment is over, trouble begins. The

Soldier and his or her Family are now accustomed to spending a level of income that no longer exists. Far too often, they have the additional problem of not being able to make the minimum payments on their debt. Now the Soldier and their Family face garnishments, letters of indebtedness, calls from collection agencies and even repossessions.

Soldiers with security clearances face the very real possibility of losing their clearances and even their careers. Financial issues account for about 90 percent of all denied and revoked security clearances. This does not have to be the case.

Finances are the No. 1 reason cited among Soldiers and their Spouses for divorce. Studies have shown, however, that couples that are willing to discuss their finances and commit to working together are able to overcome these issues and thrive financially. Finances

are a leading factor in suicides in our Army.

This all is unfortunate because Soldiers and their Families have incredible resources at their disposal for help. Most financial experts agree that as little as 10 hours of financial training can result in tremendous strides in one's financial situation.

In order to combat this, the Financial Resilience Education Enrichment program and the Financial Readiness Office are offering a one-hour class to deploying Soldiers and Spouses titled "Surviving Deployment."

This short class covers the dangers of increasing spending during deployment and shows several positive ways this windfall can be utilized. They will provide a budget worksheet that allows the Soldier and the Spouse to identify how much extra money they will be receiving during the deployment, how they will

utilize that money to improve their financial situation – and identify how to stay on their normal budget throughout the deployment. They are available to teach at the unit level as well as at Family readiness group meetings. They will work with your schedules and also are available to teach FRGs even after the unit has deployed.

I highly encourage leaders and Soldiers to take advantage of this valuable asset to improve both the financial health of your Soldiers and their Families and the overall readiness of your units. You can schedule classes on this and any other financial topics by contacting Maj. Barry Stewart at 785-240-5744 or barry.stewart@conus.army.mil.

If you would like to comment on this article or suggest a topic for Community Corner, email rlc.post.newspaper@conus.army.mil.

Deborah Cartwright, USDA, standing, talks to first-time homebuyers about USDA loans during the June 21 Home-Buying Seminar at Riley's Conference Center.



Shandi Dix
POST

First-time homebuyers learn tips to ease stress of home purchase

By Shandi Dix
1ST INF. DIV. POST

Seventeen first-time homebuyers attended the Home-Buying Seminar June 21 at Riley's Conference Center.

These seminars are conducted frequently to inform those thinking about purchasing a home for the first time about the ins and outs of the purchasing process.

"The staff at Fort Riley's Housing Services Office wants to take the fear out of buying a home," said Derina Williams, housing management specialist, Housing Services Officer, Directorate of Public Works. "Attending these seminars will give potential homebuyers the knowledge they need prior to shopping around for a realtor, lender, home inspector or title company."

Coley Coulton, wife of Sgt. Shane Coulton, Special Troops Battalion, 1st Heavy Brigade Combat Team, 1st Infantry Division, was amongst the first-time buyers.

Having known nothing prior to the seminar, Coulton said she was taking loan infor-

mation away from the seminar. "I learned about the loan processes, what's involved in making sure that everything is adequate for when you buy your home because you never know what you are going to expect if you don't get all of the stuff checked out," she said.

During each seminar, subject matter experts talk to potential homebuyers about loan processes, title companies, home inspections and the home-buying process.

Speakers included realtor Shelia Burdett, Sheila Burdett Agency; mortgage lender Gary Hawkins, Millennium Bank; Dana Quinn, Kansas Secured Title; Deborah Cartwright, USDA, and home inspector, Dave Carrara, Flint Hills Inspection, LLC.

Cartwright said she believes the seminars are important because they are the mission of USDA.

"Our purpose is to assist first-time homebuyers and new people to the area, especially for the Fort Riley regional initiative to give them all of the information possible on buying a home," she said.

During her portion of the seminar, Cartwright said she tries to teach first-time homebuyers about the variety of products available and what they need to look for.

"They need to look at not only the interest rate, but what it's going to cost them – what type of house they can look at," she said.

Many times the USDA deals with people who don't have home-buying experience, so they don't understand the credit problems that can come up and how their income can affect what they can and can't buy, Cartwright said.

Williams described the seminar as one of the best this year.

"There were 17 in attendance. The message presented by all speakers was very informational. I am confident that all our attendees left the seminar feeling empowered and more prepared to enter into the world of home buying," she said.

The seminars help bridge the gap between myths and truths about home buying, taking the fear out of purchasing a home, Williams said.



Melony Gabbert | POST
Paul Herbert, executive director, First Division Museum, second from left, receives an award of recognition for his continued support of the Families of the fallen June 29 at Grimes Hall. Pictured with Herbert, from left, are Christina Gary, lead survivor outreach services support coordinator, far left; Garrison Commander Col. Kevin Brown, second from right; Steve Tully, director, DFMWR, far right.

Foundation director receives award for support of fallen Soldiers' Families

By Melony Gabbert
1ST INF. DIV. POST

"This is about what you help keep going," said Garrison Commander Col. Kevin Brown to Paul Herbert, executive director, Cantigny First Division Foundation, part of the McCormick Foundation. Herbert was honored with a recognition award June 29 at Grimes Hall for his continued support of Families of the fallen. Herbert and the McCormick Foundation have contributed thousands of dollars to help Family members of fallen Soldiers return to Fort Riley for Ceremony of Remembrance and for Victory

Week during the last two years.

Ceremony of Remembrance honors children of fallen Soldiers, while Victory Week celebrates the history of the 1st Infantry Division and culminates in a Victory Park ceremony honoring the fallen.

"It is comforting to know there is someone who continues to support the Families of the Soldiers who have lost their lives serving our country. It's comforting to know there is someone who continues to support the Families who have lost their

soldier serving our country," said Christina Gary, lead survivor outreach services support coordinator, Survivor Outreach Services.

Herbert said that he was glad to "help in some small way," but Brown remarked that Herbert helps in a "big way."

"We appreciate all you do, and thank you for taking the time to include us in it," Herbert said.

Before departing, Herbert added, "We'll partner with you as long as there's a need. Maybe someday there won't be a need."

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