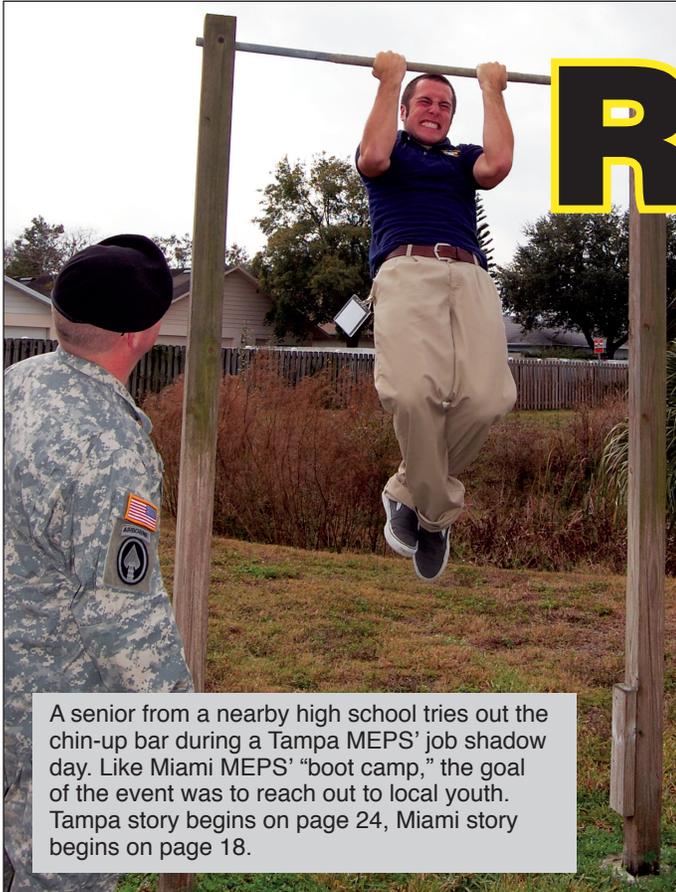


Messenger

Sharing information to reach a vision



A senior from a nearby high school tries out the chin-up bar during a Tampa MEPS' job shadow day. Like Miami MEPS' "boot camp," the goal of the event was to reach out to local youth. Tampa story begins on page 24, Miami story begins on page 18.

Reaching out to the community

articles begin on page 4

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U.S. Military Entrance Processing Command

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Messenger

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Commander's Commentary

While military units are usually part of larger installations, in most cases, our jointly staffed MEPS are a unique presence in civilian communities across the nation. As such, we have a special opportunity to reach out to those communities.

Our ability to tell the USMEPCOM story is restricted only by available manpower and the desire to make our presence known. Those MEPS far removed from major military installations represent the Department of Defense on a very personal level and may be the only uniformed personnel seen around town.

And while we never comment on wider DOD policy, we can show pride in our service and tell our personal stories of why we serve. The positive image of a sharp soldier, Marine, sailor, airman or Coast Guardsman can reaffirm the general population's well-placed confidence in our military men and women and, perhaps, encourage a young person to pursue an honorable career in the profession of arms.

Those of you located on or near a military installation can participate by integrating your skills and abilities into the host organization's programs. Are you a soldier serving on or near a Navy base or vice versa? You can bet you would be a welcome addition to the local speakers' bureau. Does the installation include a stop by the MEPS when it conducts tours for the general public? They likely would if you asked to be included. The possibilities are nearly boundless.

In addition to connecting with military installations, there are chances to do the same in civilian communities. Can you support food and clothing drives for those who are less fortunate? Does the staff have enough time to spare a few folks for a

half a day a week to mentor students or assist teachers at a local school? Are military members experienced in or willing to learn how to conduct a joint service color guard? How about participating in a flag-raising ceremony at a school or civic event? Can the MEPS provide an appropriate speaker for Memorial Day, Independence Day or Veteran's Day?

Your outreach to the community can touch an even wider audience by interacting with the local media. You have "good news" stories to tell. We've seen unique enlistments — siblings, a parent and child, or someone enlisting to honor a family member who made the ultimate sacrifice while serving. Of course, we tell these stories only if the subjects wish to do so, and after coordination with USMEPCOM and local public affairs offices.

In all these activities, the public affairs staff is ready to assist you in a host of ways. Gaylan Johnson and Kenneth Anthony are the go-to guys for biographies, speeches, ceremony scripts, media queries and guidance on being visible in the community. Diana Nicholas-Addy maintains the public Web page and MEPNET for the MEPS and Headquarters. Rhonda Burnett-Johnson fields protocol queries.

The *Messenger* keeps you informed on key programs and issues, happenings around the command, and highlights activities at your MEPS. The staff welcomes your submissions, including finished articles or story ideas. Chris Parker and Skip Wiseman are always willing to discuss story ideas, submission formats and procedures, and make suggestions on how to add impact to your story by supporting it with photographs.



Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr.

Last but not least, the graphics department is talented and responsive. Letitia Trathen is ready to process your requests and hand them off to Art Heintz or Amy Gregorksi. Take advantage of their diverse services, whether it be supporting a change of command or grand opening with invitations and programs, photographs to beautify your building, posters for special events, or signs explaining conduct rules in the MEPS.

We are fortunate to have an experienced, flexible and gifted public affairs staff. Let them give you the tools you need to succeed in making a difference in your MEPS and community.


Mariano C. Campos Jr.
Colonel, USAF
Commanding

Public Affairs

telling the USMEPCOM story

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

Versatile, experienced and unique are all apt descriptions of USMEPCOM public affairs.

In addition to the normal functions assigned to a public affairs staff — public information, community relations and command information — it handles graphics and protocol, which aren't usually found in public affairs. It also manages content on the command's Internet site and MEPNET.

"The primary functions of the public affairs office is to assist the commander, deputy commander, sector commanders and MEPS commanders in all areas of public affairs," Dan Trew, the public affairs officer, said. "It is an office unlike any I have ever been associated with in my 25 years in the public affairs field, because of the additional responsibilities."

Trew isn't sure when or why the graphics function landed in public affairs because it was there when he joined the command.

"I really don't have the history as to how it came about," he said, "but I have found in the 15-plus years I've been here that it's a natural fit because it allows us to do things in graphics, in photography, that are closely tied to the other missions of the public affairs office."

The protocol function migrated to public affairs when the commander's billet was downgraded from a one-star to an O-6 in 1993. That, too, was a natural fit because Trew was previously a protocol officer.

Although the office is all civilian now thanks to Program Budget Decision 712, staff members are heavy in military experience in general and in their chosen fields in particular.

Three members of the staff are retired military and two more spent more than 10 years each in uniform. Three other staff members have more than 20 years civil service experience.

In all, the 10 staff members have a collective 175 years military and civilian experience in their specialties and more than 85 years service with the command.

Trew said the depth and breadth of experience along with weekly staff meetings go a long way in promoting teamwork and making sure no one gets overwhelmed.

"It's a standing rule that we have a staff call at nine o'clock Monday morning," Trew said. "People update me on their current projects, what the status is, and if they are running into any problems. Because of the interaction, everybody becomes aware of what everybody else is working on."

"If one person has some slack in their job and another is getting to the point where they're about to be overrun, people jump in and assist without being asked," he said.

In addition to relying on an experienced, flexible staff, customers can refer to the Public Affairs Handbook for advice on everything from setting up a ceremony to ordering graphics products. Each commander and senior enlisted advisor gets an electronic copy of the handbook on a compact disk when they attend orientation training at the headquarters. The handbook and many other resources are also available on the MEPNET under PA Links and Resources.

"It's all there," Trew said of the handbook. "It covers everything we do in public affairs from A to Z. We even have a graphics catalog available and music the MEPS can use for ceremonies."

If customers still have questions they are always welcome to contact the public affairs staff either by phone or e-mail.

With the experience this bunch has, somebody has to have seen almost everything at least once. And public affairs people are always happy to talk. Just ask one.



Dan Trew is the USMEPCOM public affairs officer and official spokesman for the command. Trew is also the narrator for significant command or community events. Here he speaks at the recent Armed Forces Recognition Day.
Photo by Art Heintz

The window in the door

by Christine Parker
 Messenger Editor

In a way, having a public affairs office in your organization is like having an insurance policy. You don't know when you'll need it, but when the time comes, you're very relieved it's there!

This is very true in regard to the public information portion of the PA mission. This section is responsible for creating and maintaining a connection between the command and the American public. In doing so, they allow a view of the command's mission from a national level and in 66 communities across the United States.

"It's beneficial for the public to know that we're here and understand our mission," Gaylan Johnson, USMEPCOM's public information officer, said. Johnson and two others — Kenneth Anthony and Diana Nicholas-Addy — work in PI with a steady yet sometimes unpredictable workload.

In addition to providing a constant source of information to the public, they are responsible for media relations, community relations and aspects of the command's internal and public Web sites. They provide information through the PI program and there's a two-way exchange in media and community relations.

Much of what they do relates to keeping all publics informed about the command's mission and activities. As the only PAO in the command, they're responsible for supporting public information, and media and community relations activities throughout the command.

To do this, the PI staff regularly provides a steady stream of information through a variety of means to USMEPCOM's exter-



— providing
 a view of what
 goes on behind
**Freedom's
 Front Door**

nal audience. From a broad perspective, this audience is the American public, more specifically it's applicants, their families and the command's accession triad partners of military recruiting and training.

The PI staff provides a range of products, occasional training and, most importantly, constant support through advice and assistance to the entire command. Most of their products are available on the command's MEPNET. Instructions on how to locate this information and a list of PA Links and Resources is on page 10.

The media relations mission includes responding to requests from both local and national media — mainly newspapers, radio and television — and facilitating media visits at all levels of the com-

mand. Both the public affairs officer, Dan Trew, and the PA staff must be ready and expert at responding to requests that can come from any direction, at any time.

The community relations piece is exactly what its name implies — supporting relationships between the command and the communities in which it resides.

Public information

There are many moving pieces of PI that go on continuously, and most of them are a lot less obvious than media or community relations activities.

The PAO communicates the USMEPCOM message in a variety of ways, most of them printed. When appropriate, they write news releases, media advisories and coordinate hometown news releases

with the Hometown News Center. They maintain biographies for headquarters leaders and special staff and all sector and MEPS commanders and senior enlisted advisors. Once a year, they coordinate updates for all MEPS community impact statements and MEPS briefings. Occasionally they prepare command exhibits that can be displayed at national conventions or events.

Media relations

The MR function is the one that's out front and, in some ways, the exciting and attention-getting part of the PI mission. When it comes to media relations, the philosophy is simple — full disclosure.

"The public has a right to know about MEPCOM because it is a publicly funded DOD activity," Johnson said. "The taxpayers pay for us to accomplish our mission. There should be as full a disclosure as possible."

National media inquiries

The PI staff is prepared to talk to anyone who contacts the command with just about any type of query. Media relations questions are the most unpredictable portion of PI. When the phone rings in PAO, the person on the other line could be calling from the local community or from a national newspaper, magazine or television station. And the PA staff is ready to answer their questions.

However, some questions are beyond USMEPCOM's purview. In those cases, the PI section works as a liaison between the media and other Department of Defense public affairs offices.



Gaylan Johnson is often the first person you'll talk to when you call the USMEPCOM Public Affairs Office main line. He's the chief of public information and is responsible for public information, and media and community relations.

Photo by Art Heintz

Media inquiries at MEPS

Responding to a media inquiry is nothing new for the PA staff, but what happens when a person from the media calls a MEPS with a question? The first step is straightforward, according to Johnson.

"The MEPS commander writes a significant activity report, or SAR, and sends it to the chain of command," he said. Guidance for writing this type of SAR can be found on the MEPNET in PA Links

and Resources, MEPS Support Documents.

The public affairs office receives a copy of the SAR. Often, this is PAO's first notification of the event. If appropriate, a PA staff member will contact the MEPS.

"I think our office has built a reputation, not only here at headquarters, but also out in the field, that we're going to provide superb support to a MEPS when they get a phone call from the local media," Trew said.

Johnson explains that the best policy for responding to media questions is keeping it in the area in which it originated.

"If a local newspaper, radio or news station calls up the local MEPS with a question the MEPS can answer, then it ought to be grass roots to grass roots," he said. That's much better than the local media person receiving an answer from a remote location "on high."

"It's also a big plus for community relations. MEPS commanders talking to the media — after consultation with PAO — builds their credibility and gives the MEPS visibility, too," Johnson said.

MEPS commanders can refer to their MEPS briefing and community impact statement to formulate answers for many local inquiries. Those two documents are updated yearly.

"Those are releasable documents. MEPS commanders can give that information out to anyone," Johnson said. "Not everyone knows this."

And, although MEPS commanders can effectively deal with local media inquiries, the PAO is always there for back-up. "We're the PAO for the whole command — we're here to advise others at MEPS, but dealing with the press is still our job and we're responsible for it," Johnson said.

In general, MEPS receive three types of media inquiries: questions about the processing mission, requests for access to a MEPS and questions after an incident occurs at a MEPS.

Questions about processing

Both headquarters and MEPS receive questions about the USMEPCOM mission. At headquarters, Trew is the official command spokesman. At each MEPS, the commander is the spokesperson.

"We use this saying with MEPS commanders all the time: 'stay in your lane,'" Johnson said. "You can talk about anything that goes on in your MEPS — mission-wise — and you can talk about your personal experiences in the military or your career. What you know about and your responsibilities.

"The MEPS commander is responsible for the whole MEPS," Johnson emphasized. "But a MEPS commander is not a spokesperson for the Department of Defense or any of the military services. Just that MEPS."

If the MEPS commander is on leave and has delegated command authority to someone else, then that person is the MEPS spokesperson. And this does happen.

Once the spokesperson is determined, their first goal is to determine what information the media is seeking. "Write down the questions," Johnson said. "and tell them you'll get back to them as soon as you can. Also, ask them for their deadline. Once you have that information, pick up the phone and call PAO.

"There are a lot of people [reporters] who don't know a lot about military organizations and how they function and are structured," Johnson said. "I spend a lot of time explaining our mission to reporters. Educating them, giving them the framework so they understand what we do."

The USMEPCOM story

The USMEPCOM Story is a one-page description of the command's mission, functions, organization and includes up-to-date yearly figures for military processing and student testing. The public affairs office staff ensure this document is up-to-date and available on the MEPNET.

Command personnel can use this document as a tool for local media relations and public information.

Johnson said that many reporters either have an incorrect perception of our mission or don't know about it at all. "You've got to build a picture for them and that helps them formulate better questions," he said.

"We try to be accommodating. I'd say 98 percent of reporters appreciate our efforts and are willing to work with us," Johnson said.

Requests for access to a MEPS

In general, MEPS receive requests for access more often than MEPS receive questions from the media. "A lot of reporters are interested in what we do," Johnson said.

Often, they want to follow an applicant through the process. Some of their requests are part of long-term projects — where they start out with the individual at a recruiting station and follow them as far as basic training.

And, often, they don't have a lot of questions on these visits. "The media has become increasingly more visual," Johnson said. Often, they're looking for a still photo or videotape of military processing to tell the story.

With this type of request, Johnson explains that a MEPS can think of itself as a local business. "If you are a manager of a Wal-Mart and the Channel 5 News team shows up at your front door without warning, you don't have to let them in."

The media can film from public property, for example, a public street. "But the MEPS parking lot and front lawn are not public property, they're part of the MEPS real estate," Johnson said. "It's

the commander's call how he wants to handle the situation, and every situation is different."

Requests from the media to visit a MEPS are so frequent that the PAO has provided specific "MEPS Media Ground Rules" in a document that's available on the MEPNET, again, in PA Links and Resources."

Post-incident requests for information

In the case of adverse events, Johnson said, "We've learned to deal with them very calmly and rationally." Trew has worked at USMEPCOM for about 15 years. Before that he was an Army post PAO. Johnson has worked at USMEPCOM for about 14 years and has been in public affairs for more than 20. After working with a variety of media inquiries, the two bring a certain "calm" to any media situation.

"Dealing with the media is not uppermost in their minds," Johnson said, referring to a MEPS commander who may have just had an unfortunate incident in the MEPS that could attract media attention. "They're not thinking about a reporter showing up at their door. But, sometimes, the reporters are there."

In the case of such a media-attracting event, MEPS commanders can share three pieces of information with the media. One, they can verify if the individual involved is or was scheduled to process at the MEPS that day. Two, that it's DOD policy not to comment on ongoing investigations. And, three, that the appropriate law enforcement officials have jurisdiction over the incident and must answer any related media questions.

"It's that simple," Johnson said. However, he clarified that the PAO is always just a phone call away.

The main phone line

Recent changes to its public web site made USMEPCOM's direct contact phone number more visible and this resulted in a significant increase in calls to the command's main telephone line — answered by the public affairs office. A line that once received normal PAO-related calls now receives a greater breadth of calls — anything from an applicant with questions about their processing to a prior military member trying to locate their DD 214.

Also, in this age of information, a Google search for "military processing" offers up the first and obvious choice — a link to USMEPCOM's home page. One click and "Contact Us" offers the

continued on page 8

The Public Affairs Handbook

The Public Affairs Handbook covers everything associated with public affairs. "From how to execute a promotion ceremony, change of command ceremony or grand opening to how to write an article for the *Messenger* or how to get graphic artwork to decorate their MEPS," Dan Trew, public affairs officer, said.

"It's all in there. It explains how to respond to a media inquiry. There's even a graphic arts catalog. It covers everything from A to Z," Trew said.

However, sometimes MEPS personnel don't know the publication is available. "When a MEPS is preparing for an

upcoming change of command or a senior enlisted advisor's change of responsibility, they don't know it exists," Trew said. "The handbook spells out everything they need to know for those types of ceremonies.

To combat this, the PAO ensures commanders and SEAs receive a CD containing the handbook at new commander and SEA training.

Also, command personnel can download a PDF of the document from the MEPNET. Directions to do this are found in the PA Links and Resources article on page 10. The PA Handbook is the first item under MEPS Support Documents.

direct phone line to PAO, (847) 688-4874.

The phone line, as well as the “Contact Us” e-mail address, HQ-MPA-INFO@mepcom.army.mil, receive daily inquiries. The PI section is ready for any and all.

Community relations

All facets of USMEPCOM — headquarters, sectors and MEPS — can better connect with their communities through community relations programs. By doing this, they build relationships and keep the public informed about the military processing mission. There are endless ways to reach out — by getting involved in local organizations, providing color guards, volunteering at local agencies or schools, holding open houses or grand openings, or speaking at local events.

“It’s important that the MEPS participate in community events whenever possible, so they’re telling the DOD story,” Trew said. “In order to do that, they’ve got to talk to community groups, chambers of commerce, and veterans groups like the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars], American Legion.”

Local organizations

Commanders of MEPS are authorized to use their discretionary funds to purchase one membership in a local group like the Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, Lions, etc. They can coordinate the memberships with the Resource Management Directorate, or J-8. The membership must be in the name of the MEPS (not the commander) so that the transition is seamless upon a change of command.

Trew encourages such memberships. “When I talk to new MEPS commanders or senior enlisted advisors, I emphasize that they have this opportunity.”

Joint service color guard requests

USMEPCOM is unique in that it is a joint-service organization located in 66 communities across the United States. Because of this, MEPS often receive requests to provide joint service color guards.

Before Program Budget Decision 712, USMEPCOM’s base of almost 3,000 personnel was made up of a 50/50 mix of civilians/military. After PBD 712, the command is now about an 80/20 mix of civilians/military. Because of this, USMEPCOM cannot provide as many joint service color guards throughout the United States.

“Although PBD 712 has really cramped our style as far as how often we can provide a joint service color guard, we’re still the only nationwide joint command that is capable of doing them,” Trew said.

“PBD 712 has hurt us in that area,” he said. “But the MEPS can coordinate with the IRCs [interservice recruiting committees] to get members from the various services. If it’s for Veteran’s Day,



(Standing, front, left to right) USMEPCOM Senior Enlisted Advisor, Command Sgt. Maj. William Lindo, USMEPCOM Commander Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr., and Commander, Naval Service Training Command, Rear Adm. Arnold Lotring were guests of honor at a recent Armed Forces Recognition Ceremony at headquarters. USMEPCOM is a tenant organization on Naval Station Great Lakes, located nearby. *Photo by Art Heintz*

Fourth of July or Memorial Day, we want to get them out in their communities to show the flag.”

Volunteering

MEPS commanders have the authority to allow their personnel



Letitia Trathen (left) and Kenneth Anthony do a final check on place cards for the recent Armed Forces Recognition Ceremony. The entire public affairs staff pitches in to accomplish an array of behind-the-scenes details that ensure this type of event goes smoothly. *Photo by Art Heintz*

schools. Most issues of the *Messenger* feature MEPS personnel who have volunteered in the community — from groups who serve meals on Thanksgiving, bring stuffed animals to people in hospitals or collect school supplies for children who need them.

In addition to helping local agencies, MEPS personnel can volunteer their time at nearby schools. “We have quite a few MEPS that are involved in programs like the Adopt-A-School Program,” Trew said.

Guidelines for volunteering time or helping in fund-raising efforts is included in the PA Handbook (available on the MEPNET). Also, call the USMEPCOM PAO with any type of concerns or questions.

Grand openings and open houses

Grand openings are an elaborate way of telling the USMEPCOM story to prominent members of the civilian community. These events normally coincide with the opening or re-opening of a MEPS.

Also, MEPS can hold an open house to establish and improve its relationship with the local community. This type of event can be scheduled to coincide with Armed Forces Day, military service birthdays, or to mark the history of a MEPS.

In the case of both grand openings and open houses, refer to the PA Handbook or contact USMEPCOM PAO for guidance.

Speaking engagements

Speaking in the community is another great way to reach out. Often it’s someone from the community who contacts the MEPS and asks for a speaker. In this case, as similar ones, call USMEPCOM PAO for guidance or help.

Speech writing support

USMEPCOM speakers do not have to write their own material. The public affairs office will provide, on request, a localized speech suitable for the occasion.

Always proceed with caution

When a community organization contacts a MEPS and requests involvement from them, Trew asks MEPS commanders to always proceed with caution.

“Contact us first, before you agree to getting involved. We want to take a look at the event or activity to make sure that no one is profiting from it and that we can participate in it,” Trew said. “We have to be very careful.

“If it’s a color guard for a nationwide event, before a MEPS commits, we need to know about it because we need to inform DOD Public Affairs.

“We’ve provided color guards for a World Series game, at the Superbowl, at an NBA all star game,” Trew said.

“We also need to ensure, especially with this being an election year, that a MEPS doesn’t have someone who is running for office give a speech in one of our facilities. That’s strictly forbidden by DOD. There is no reason someone running for office cannot attend a grand opening ceremony, but the MEPS needs to ensure the individual is told they cannot make a political speech,” Trew explained.

In all cases with events or activities that connect with the community, the best advice is call the USMEPCOM Public Affairs Office first!



Public Affairs Specialist Kenneth Anthony adjusts a flag during a recent Armed Forces Recognition Ceremony at headquarters. The PAO ensured all 57 state and territorial flags were displayed on the front lawn that day — both to recognize service members from the nation and to shine a spotlight on the command.

Photo by Art Heintz

How they keep the public informed

Part of the public information, media relations and community relations mission is keeping the public informed about the command and its activities. The following are brief descriptions of the programs that contribute to doing this.

News releases

Occasionally the PA staff writes a news release about a new program or event. A recent example of such an event was the headquarters change of command in April. The PAO staff wrote the article and provided photos of the event so local newspapers could easily pick up the story.

MEPS staff can work with PAO to write news releases for events like changes of command, open houses, VIP visits or unusual enlistments.

Media advisories

When the command has something to announce on a national level the PA staff works with the Office of the Chief of Public Affairs or the DOD Press Desk. A recent example of this was when the command enlisted the first recruits using biometric technology. USMEPCOM Public Affairs worked to ensure this event was publicized nationally.

Hometown News Release Program

The public affairs office is the liaison between command personnel and the media through the Hometown News Release Program. Upon a significant event, such as a promotion, award, re-enlistment, retirement or special achievement, command personnel — military and civilian — can submit a Hometown News Release, a DD Form 2266, to PAO. The public affairs staff will review it and then submit the form to the Army/Air Force Hometown News Center or the Fleet Hometown News Center. There, the information is turned into a press release for media throughout the United States. More than 13,000 outlets — print, radio and television — subscribe to these military news services in order to pick up stories about folks from their communities.

Community impact statements, MEPS VIP briefings

Updated annually, both are tools for communicating the MEPS mission to local community groups, and both military and civilian visitors to the MEPS, including media representatives. Both are releasable without further approval.

Biographies

The command maintains biographies on headquarters, sector and MEPS commanders and senior enlisted advisors, and a variety of special staff from headquarters. These biographies are available on the USMEPCOM Web site and the MEPNET.

USMEPCOM Web site & MEPNET

This is a new area of responsibility for public affairs. Until recently, the Information Management Directorate (J-6) had the lead in creating and maintaining USMEPCOM's public Web site

and MEPNET. There's an article about PA's involvement in the USMEPCOM Web site and MEPNET on page 11.

Television and radio interviews

Occasionally, the PAO will coordinate national television or radio interviews. A recent example of this was when Federal Radio News interviewed Dale Ostrowski about biometric technology in the MEPS. Ostrowski is the deputy director of the USMEPCOM Operations Directorate (J-3). The interview is available on the MEPNET main page under "In The News."

— *Christine Parker*

Public Affairs Links and Resources

Available on the MEPNET:

<https://mepnet.mepcom.army.mil/ui/User/Landing/default.aspx>

Once there, go to:

- Headquarters
- MPA
- Links & Resources

Scroll down to:

- Messenger Magazine
- U.S. Armed Forces links:
 - Print News
 - Televised News
 - Online Service Magazines
 - Senior Leadership Biographies
- Policy Memorandums
- **MEPS Support Documents**
 - Public Affairs Handbook
 - Biography Worksheets
 - Freedom's Front Door
 - Photo Release Form
 - MEPS Talking Points
 - USMEPCOM Story
 - Demonstration Talking Points
 - Guidance for Political Demonstrations
 - Media Ground Rules
 - SAR Guidance
 - USMEPCOM Business Card Template
- Clip Art
- Ceremony Music
- Protocol
- MEPS Community Impact Statements
- MEPS VIP Briefings

New administrator takes on public Web site, MEPNET

By Christine Parker
Messenger Editor

The Internet and intranets crept into our lives more than 10 years ago. Now, most USMEPCOM personnel use both the Internet and the command's intranet, aptly named the MEPNET, on a daily basis.

Considering they're technology-based tools, most people look to their information technology specialists to keep them running smoothly. Clearly, maintaining computers and networks is the bread and butter of IT's mission. However, over time, organizations realized that determining the content of a public Web site or intranet pages requires different skills, including a thorough understanding of all things related to internal and external information. That's where public affairs entered in.

In March, the public affairs office hired its first PA specialist whose main function is to act as the command's web administrator. In comparison to the much used term, webmaster, the web administrator assesses and maintains the overall presentation and content of the command's public Web site and MEPNET. The command's webmaster continues to hold up the technical end of both.

"I look at myself as a watchdog to make sure the public site and the MEPNET work in the best way to enhance everybody's work environment," Diana Nicholas-Addy, the new web administrator said. Nicholas-Addy has a lengthy PA background, including military and civilian experience in print and broadcast journalism, videography and photography. She holds a bachelor's degree in television production as well.

So, as the very first web administrator, where do you start? Nicholas-Addy's first goal was ensuring USMEPCOM becomes Section 508 compliant. "It's legislation that spells out how federal agencies must ensure their electronic and information technology is accessible to people with disabilities," Nicholas-Addy said.



Diana Nicholas-Addy is USMEPCOM's new web administrator.
Photo by Art Heintz

The legislation does not carry over into private industry yet, but some companies are implementing the guidance. "The federal government is enforcing it within itself to protect their federal workers who have disabilities," she said. When it comes to USMEPCOM, Nicholas-Addy has already made changes to ensure the command's public Web site and MEPNET becomes Section 508 compliant. And, if you're curious about the looks of a Section 508-compliant web page and how a user can transform type from small to much larger, go to www.section508.gov.

Public Web site

In addition to ensuring Section 508 compliance, Nicholas-Addy is focusing on two areas of the public Web site — its security and privacy. "The web site is like a door for the public to come into USMEPCOM and we want to ensure there is nothing there that could be harmful to anyone who works at any of our locations," she said.

Most recently, Nicholas-Addy has been working to fix a glitch that was created on all 65 MEPS' public pages when the Department of Defense ceased running SITES, the Standard Installation Topic Exchange Service. After 14 years, DOD discontinued this relocation information assistance site and now offers similar information and relocation tools at www.militaryonesource.com and www.MilitaryHOMEFRONT.dod.mil/moving. The problem has been fixed on the headquarters page, but some MEPS Web pages still refer to the SITES location.

MEPNET

When it comes to the MEPNET, Nicholas-Addy is focusing on updating the layout, ensuring the pages have similar content and enabling users to navigate through the pages in a parallel way. "The MEPNET, as it is, was a good starting point," she said. "Since then we've become more sophisticated in using technology and we need the site to grow with how we handle information."

In order to accomplish this, she plans to work more with content editors throughout the command. "I oversee the big picture, but the content editors make changes in their own areas," Nicholas-Addy said. She plans to better familiarize herself with content editors, to include knowing who's arriving and leaving, and eventually provide training so that they can provide comparable updates to their pages.

In addition to these efforts, she's focusing on MEPNET security. "We can't put anything on the MEPNET that is going to give someone a door to get in," Nicholas-Addy warned. A common way to do this is by adding a link from the MEPNET to an external link like yahoo.com or CNN.com.

"Intranets are like 'panic rooms,' she explained, "a place where only the people inside an organization can access information." Nicholas-Addy plans to keep the MEPNET that way.

In addition to attending the most recent public affairs training for web administration, Nicholas-Addy and Richard Adams of the systems development branch of IT are communicating with and plan to visit web developers and administrators from the U.S. Army Recruiting Command. The two plan to improve USMEPCOM's site and MEPNET through combining Adams' technical expertise and Nicholas-Addy's creative approach.

"I feel my responsibility is to incorporate changes that are going to help everyone exchange information in the best way possible," Nicholas-Addy said. "The issues are intriguing and I am thoroughly enjoying trying to find solutions."

Pretty Pictures

Graphic arts and photography illustrate the USMEPCOM story

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

If you come up with the idea, the graphics department in public affairs can most likely complete the project — and they prove it more than 400 times a year.

From redesigning command coins for the headquarters and sectors to producing photos and artwork to decorate a MEPS, the staff is ready to help.

Dan Trew, USMEPCOM's public affairs officer, said the graphic artists can produce products that "look as good as anything you can buy in a store.

"They're the best," he said. "The graphic arts shop has state-of-the-art Macintosh (computers), which are the best in the business, plus all the associated equipment that allows us to do some spectacular things.

"You can give them a concept and they're able to take it and come up with a top-notch product," Trew said.

"The graphic artists know how an invitation should be worded," he said. "They know how programs should be put together. Since we have all this sophisticated equipment, we can print the invitations and programs. That's a benefit to the MEPS because they don't have to take it to a printer and use their mission funds to have it printed. It all comes out of the headquarters."

Art Heintz is the command photographer and longest-tenured member of the public affairs staff. He joined the command in 1989 and has been a photographer for more than 50 years. He is also the office's resident expert on maintaining and upgrading the Macintosh computers used to produce photos, graphics products and publications.

Amy Gregorski is the graphic artist. She brings more than 25 years of experience to the table. Gregorski, who joined the staff about two years ago, produces change of command invitations and programs, posters, original graphic arts products and the covers for the *Messenger*.

Letitia Trathen is the public affairs assistant who receives work requests from customers and directs them to the person best able to complete the project.

Sometimes that's her. She produces many of the name tags, place cards and other frequently requested items.

Several other staff members lend a hand when the workload gets too heavy or if someone is on leave.

The first step in getting a project started is to contact Trathen. She consults with Heintz and Gregorski to see if the project is possible, how long it would take and what the customer needs to provide to get it done.

Graphics requests can be made in person, via telephone or by e-mail. Projects are normally due out in two weeks, but it rarely takes that long, Trathen said.

"The normal turnaround time is seven days or less," she said. "In the case of a change of command or if a project is very complicated it could be a bit longer."

As with most of the staff, Trathen doesn't limit herself to her primary duties.

"If there is a project I can do myself, I'll let (the customer) know. If not, I review it and forward it to Amy or Art," she said. "I also mount, laminate and frame posters, assist with audiovisual requirements and check out equipment.



Amy Gregorski is a graphic artist who works in USMEPCOM public affairs. She designs an array of products for the MEPS, sectors and headquarters, including the cover design of the *Messenger*. Photo by Art Heintz

“Any equipment checkout comes through me,” Trathen said, “whether it’s harnesses for the color guard, a punch bowl or audiovisual equipment. I enjoy the variety of stuff I have to do. It’s different all the time.”

Trathen also produces trip books when the commander visits MEPS and business cards for those who are authorized.

“Who we can do business cards for is limited by regulation,” she said. “If we can’t do them, we can provide a template so the person can produce them on their own.”

If a work request calls for photography, it goes to Heintz.

“I do all the photographic imaging,” he said. “It’s all done electronically in Photoshop. We can retouch right on the image where years ago you used a brush or a pencil or a knife.”

Heintz is also the guy who sneaks up on people and startles them with his flash at conferences and ceremonies. For instance, he’ll shoot 2,000-3,000 frames at an event like the National Training Conference to produce 500-750 images.

“It used to be that you’d take those things into the darkroom, print them out and make individual copies for people,” he said. “It took a long time. Now you work on the computer to retouch it and enhance it. Then you print it out on photo paper or on the plotter if it’s for (an official) display.”

“For retirements, changes of command or organization day, we put it in a PowerPoint show and run it out in the halls for people to see and then put it in a booklet or on disk and ship it to wherever you need it to go.”

For the NTC, Heintz sent two CD copies of the images to each MEPS, one for the commander and one for the senior enlisted advisor.

“If there was something they liked, they could have it printed,” Heintz said. “If it is for official use, we print it for them. If its for something like their scrapbook, they had it on disk and could use it to their advantage.”

One of the department’s most popular products is 18 x 24 prints suitable for framing which can be used to decorate a MEPS. Military operations, processing and historical photos are all available.

“We do posters of the various armed forces operations,” he said, “and people processing through the MEPS, so applicants know a little bit about what they’re going to go through.”

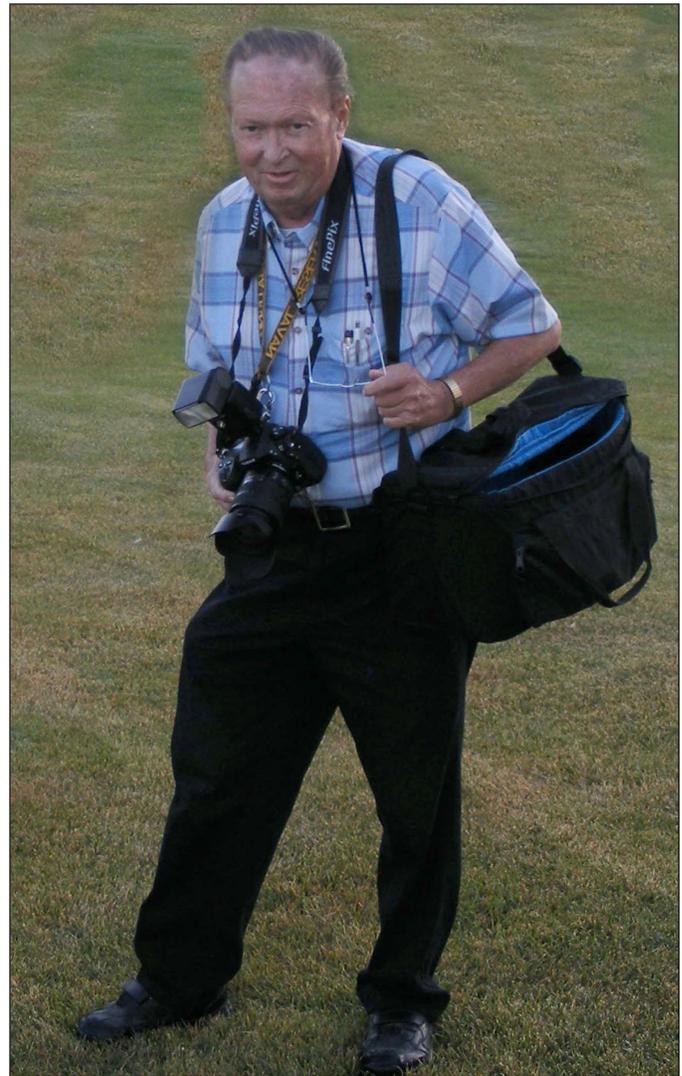
“We have a hundred or so old-time photos, World War I processing and stuff like that,” he said. “When you get into modern processing, we probably have a couple thousand. Those are updated every six months or so. We’ll go out and shoot new ones because things like testing and fingerprinting change. We try to keep it up-to-date.”

The graphics department has used only digital cameras since 2002. The first “professional” digital camera the office had was a Nikon 460 that had about five megapixels resolution. Today, Heintz uses a Fuji model, equivalent to a Nikon, with 12 megapixels. Even though today’s digital cameras are more sophisticated, the cost has dropped dramatically.

Years ago, “We got a camera that, at that time, was quite expensive,” Heintz said, “but it didn’t hold up too well. The batteries were internal and you had to send it out to replace the batteries. It spent more time in the repair shop than it did here. The new cameras are quite a bit more reliable. Today I can pick one up for \$200 that would’ve cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 15 years ago.”

“We plan on going (to) higher (resolution),” Heintz said. “We have one on order that will handle infrared and everything.”

Gregorski does everything from tabletop signs to designing logos for organizations. She produces invitations and programs for



Art Heintz is the longest-tenured member of the public affairs office and has been a photographer for more than 50 years.

a variety of events, posters for conferences and special events, and the *Messenger* cover.

“I create images for briefings, a lot of posters for organization day, holiday parties, fundraising, readiness support group and the National Training Conference,” she said. “I altered the Eastern Sector coin to include the current commander’s F.L.A.G. [family, leadership, ambassadorship and growth] acronym. I created the Western Sector coin from scratch as well as note cards for the commander.”

She will redesign the USMEPCOM coin soon.

Although Gregorski earned a bachelor’s degree in art and art education and planned on teaching, she ended up doing freelance work until she entered the civil service in the mid 1980s. Although her plans for a teaching career never panned out, she still finds that a lot of her products educate people.

“I created products for educational purposes when I was working for the Army and then the Navy,” she said. “Now that I’m at MEPCOM, I look at the public affairs function as still trying to inform and educate people. It’s a little different focus, but I still get to create and that’s the best part. That’s my joy. I have a very busy desk, but I love being busy.”



Teamwork is key in public affairs. Many of the office's projects involve layers of specialties. Here, Letitia Trathen (left) and Gaylan Johnson look over updates to a command briefing. *Photo by Christine Parker*

Some of her products reach far beyond USMEPCOM. She designed banners and advertising to support the ASVAB Career Exploration Program.

"The testing division's contract with their advertising firm ended and there wasn't money to replace that resource," Gregorski said. "They had seen some of my other products and asked if I would be able to put together some advertising for them.

"It started out with two banners they take on the road and put up at trade shows," she said. "Since then, I put together a series of



Again, with teamwork in mind, members of the public affairs office step in to complete a project when someone from another area is out of the office. Here, Skip Wiseman laminates posters. Wiseman has worked in every area of Public Affairs during his more than 12 years at USMEPCOM PAO as both an Air Force master sergeant and a civilian. *Photo by Art Heintz*

advertising. They've had the opportunity to publish one of the advertisements."

Gregorski hopes to do more advertising for the testing division.

"That will be their decision," she said, "but in the interest of using our in-house talents as well as saving money, I hope we have future opportunities. It's a little bit different. It's a new, fun, challenging thing to do."

Talented as she is, Gregorski is not a magician. She can't pull products out of thin air — it takes time and a lot of work. A simple change of command program takes four to six man-hours when editing, proofreading and corrections are taken into account. More complex projects take even longer, even when everything goes just right.

"Some products fall right into place," Gregorski said. "I was able to do the most recent *Messenger* cover in about 16 hours. The one before that, with the train and the railroad tracks and the rocks took about 40 hours."

Most projects are a combination of original illustrations and clip art, for which the office has a subscription.

The graphics department uses Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign to create products. Creative Suite 3 integrates all three including the ability to "drag and drop" items from one program to another. Gregorski said that flexibility is important.

"InDesign is used for publishing," she said. "You have a lot of control and ability to tweak copy to fit. Photoshop can edit photos. You can take an Illustrator drawing and enhance it (in Photoshop) and give it different effects that aren't achievable in Illustrator. Between Illustrator and Photoshop you can create an enhanced image that nobody else can duplicate. That's the beauty of Creative Suite. It all works together."

The public affairs office uses Macintosh computers to produce publications and other products for a number of reasons. First, Macs are the industry standard for professional printing and have long been the platform of choice for graphic arts and desktop publishing. It is also easier to add memory to Macintosh computers. The ability to store large files, often more than 100 megabytes for one image is vital.

"Photoshop is a memory eater," Heintz said. "It's not like word processing where you're operating all on one level. In Photoshop you develop in layers. It's nothing for one picture to be 50 or 100 meg, even as big as a gigabyte.

"PCs are made for the individual person at home," he said. "The Mac is made for the printing industry. They put more memory in them and leave space for you to add memory."

With external storage, each Macintosh in the graphics department can hold up to 750 gigabytes.

If a customer dreams up an idea, the graphics department can usually make it a reality, and the final product is often better than the original concept. All it takes is some time, technology and a lot of imagination.

Public Affairs 'inherits' protocol

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

Protocol doesn't usually fall under public affairs, but it's in good hands here in USMEPCOM. It landed in public affairs when the commander's position was downgraded from a general officer slot.

"Because it was a one star billet, they had an aide-de-camp," Dan Trew, USMEPCOM public affairs officer, said. "The aide-de-camp handled protocol. When the billet was downgraded, there was no aide-de-camp, so they looked around at where to put the protocol mission.

"I had been a protocol officer and they felt it was the right fit," he said. "It was primarily an additional duty until we rewrote some job descriptions. The public affairs administrative assistant is now primarily responsible for the protocol mission."

Trew said protocol is needed because it sets the tone for meetings and visits.

"Protocol is important because it gives a good impression of the command right off the bat to very influential people, whether they be flag officers, politicians or other VIPs," he said. "Plus if you're having a guest, regardless of whether it's a VIP or not, you want to put your best foot forward and treat that person the way they should be treated.

"Protocol is nothing more than common sense," Trew said. "It's how you would like to be treated if you were in the visitor's shoes."

The protocol function is now in the hands of Rhonda Burnett-Johnson. Still relatively new at the job, she attended two training courses and relies on "The Complete Handbook of Diplomatic Official and Social Usage." Trew is also a ready reference.

"He always gets me on the right track," she said. "He's very knowledgeable. He doesn't have to refer to a book or a regulation like I do."



Rhonda Burnett-Johnson handles protocol for USMEPCOM Public Affairs.
Photo by Art Heintz

She also relies on other members of the staff who have experience in specific areas of protocol, such as seating arrangements, and invitation and program content and design.

Burnett-Johnson handles requests for money from the secretary of the Army's Representation Funds, commonly known as .0012 funds.

They can be used for food and refreshments for grand openings and visits by foreign dignitaries.

"It's a common misconception that changes of command can use .0012 money, but that's not correct," Burnett-Johnson said. "A MEPS can have up to \$100 for foreign visitors and up to \$600 for a grand opening."

Requests should be made 30 days before the event to allow processing. A proposed list of invitees must accompany the letter of



Community events bring together military organizations and leaders from the local community. Here, Rear Adm. Arnold Lotring (left) talks with Waukegan Mayor Richard Hyde and (center) North Chicago Mayor Leon Rockingham Jr. talks with USMEPCOM Commander, Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr.
Photo by Art Heintz

request, which is signed by the MEPS commander. The letter should include basic information including who, what, when, where and why. The request must also include what will be purchased, from whom, and an itemized list of costs.

Sixty percent of the invitees must be authorized guests, meaning they have no ties to the military and are being invited based on their position in the community, such as being a member of local government or a prominent businessperson. Some military retirees can be authorized guests, some cannot. For instance, a city councilman who happened to be a military retiree could be an authorized guest based on his civilian position. A former MEPS commander would be considered a DOD guest.

"Once we receive everything and the guest list checks out, I submit a memorandum to (David O'Brien) the chief of staff requesting funds for the event," Burnett-Johnson said.

"Once the event is over, they have two weeks to get us copies of the receipts and the Miscellaneous Obligation Document, which tells how much money they were authorized and how much they spent."

Overall, most protocol questions for ceremonies and VIP visitors are covered in Chapters 5 and 6 of the USMEPCOM Public Affairs Handbook. MEPS commanders and senior enlisted advisors have copies of the handbook on CD-ROM and it is also available on the MEPNET at PA Links and Resources. If questions persist, the public affairs staff is a phone call away.

"They should contact Rhonda first," Trew said. "If it gets to the point where it's a sticky situation, I like the MEPS commander or the senior enlisted advisor to call me direct and I'll walk them through the process. They need to get into that public affairs handbook, because we pretty much discuss every situation."

Publishing Puzzle

Writing, designing the *Messenger* means fitting the pieces together

Assembling a magazine like the *Messenger* is kind of like two people working on the same jigsaw puzzle.

They start out by opening the (e-mail) box and laying out all the pieces on the (computer) desktop. Then they find the edge pieces and put together the frame. They sort the interior pieces into groups they think might make up certain areas of the puzzle and begin placing the pieces. Sometimes they work on the same part of the puzzle, but most often they are working on different areas.

They each work on one section of the puzzle until they get frustrated or hit a dead end. Then they move on to another section or just switch areas to get a fresh set of eyes on things.

The more pieces they put together, the easier it is to figure out where the remaining pieces go. The last few pieces fall into place and, Voila! the puzzle is done.

Once a year, Christine Parker, the editor, and Skip Wiseman, associate editor, develop a list of eight to 10 suggested themes and then meet with Dan Trew, the public affairs officer, to whittle it down to six.

“The *Messenger* is a very important publication because it allows the commander to talk to members of the command about what his priorities are, to let them know what he feels is important,” Trew said. “The main articles talk about the theme in depth. We encourage the MEPS to contribute to that theme from their level.

“It also allows the MEPS to brag, if you will, to the command about the things they’re doing within the community,” he said.

“Each magazine has a theme,” Parker said. “The first thing we determine is what feature articles we want to include and who is going to write what. Based on that, one of us usually takes the lead on the rewrites and design while the other focuses on writing and designing the feature pages.”

Parker and Wiseman start out by sorting the pieces. They divvy up who is going to do which staff-generated articles and divide the copy editing and photo preparation. In most cases, they share the workload pretty evenly throughout the process.

Items received from the MEPS are either grouped with like items from other units in categories such as Fond Farewells, New Faces, Applause, etc. Other submissions are rewritten to comply with the Associated Press Stylebook and the command’s supplemental rules. In all cases, if the person takes the time to write and submit an article, they get a byline.

“That’s always been our policy,” Wiseman said. “If someone puts in the effort to write something, they deserve the credit. Sometimes we have to put some time into it and maybe call them for additional information, but they started the ball rolling, so they get the byline. The only exception is if an author quotes himself in the article. Then we have to decide whether to print a byline or the direct quote.

“We print pretty much whatever the MEPS send us,” he said. “The only reasons we wouldn’t print an article is if it violates policy or propriety. A number of years ago, a MEPS sent us a photo in honor of Flag Day. It was an attractive young NCO wrapped in an American flag. We obviously didn’t use that.”

Once all the submissions are assembled, they are edited and get their first proofreading. Parker and Wiseman start multi-tasking, simultaneously researching, conducting interviews and writing articles, and designing pages.

“There’s always some time between gathering background information and doing interviews to lay out a few pages,” Parker said. “You can’t do much writing until you get the interviews done and you can’t do an interview until you have some background on the topic yourself. Instead of just waiting around, you design pages with the completed articles. It’s not unusual to have two or three articles in the works and be designing pages at the same time.



Christine Parker. Photo by Art Heintz

Tips for making the *Messenger*

Who, what when, where, why and how

- Try to fit all five in the first paragraph, if possible
- Just the facts, please
- If you can ask, “who says” it needs attribution
- Write in third person; avoid “I” and “we”
- Submit text in Microsoft Word

What is news?

- Has audience appeal
- Is in good taste
- Is factual

Be timely

- Submit articles as soon as possible
- Don’t wait for the deadline; sometimes there is space in the next *Messenger* and your article may get “picked up” early

Photos

- Submit in JPEG or TIF format
- Don’t embed in Word document; send separate file
- Action photos are best
- Avoid “grip and grin” and group photos

“Once we have a good idea of how or where the theme is going, I consult with Amy Gregorski, our graphic artist, on the cover,” she said. “That way we have unity of design between the cover and the theme. We often use elements of the cover in designing the inside pages.”

The magazine is usually laid out from back to front because the shorter items not associated with the theme are usually done first. Regular articles like the profiles on commanders and senior enlisted advisors are next. Submissions from the field that relate to the theme go further forward in the magazine to support the main features.

Once the feature writing is done, Parker and Wiseman determine about how many pages they need for the articles, photos and other artwork and set to work on designing the theme pages.

After final adjustments are made to the overall layout and design, all the pages are proofread for the second time. After corrections are made, the magazine gets one more thorough proofing, and final adjustments to the layout and design are made. A final check for unity of design, organization and overall look wrap things up before the issue is sent to the printer.

By contract, the printer must provide a final proof copy three business days later. Once Parker approves the final proof, the printer cranks up the presses, churns out 3,000 copies and ships them five days later. Once it is published, a PDF version is put on both the MEPNET and the USMEPCOM home page.



Skip Wiseman edits a photo for the *Messenger*. Photo by Art Heintz

Oh, and one more thing. Working on a publication is like putting together a jigsaw in another way — it’s addicting. Once you finish one, you can’t wait to start the next.

Just ask Parker and Wiseman. They’ve each been doing one “publication puzzle” or another for more than 20 years, and neither one plans to quit anytime soon.

Snowball in Florida

Miami MEPS community outreach just keeps growing and growing

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

There's a snowball at the Miami MEPS — and it's getting bigger all the time. Community outreach has a way of doing that once the program gets rolling.

MEPS staff members made a connection with the Miami-Dade County Schools through the Career Exploration Program and soon found themselves involved in other programs.

The MEPS now conducts a boot camp-style program for students in conjunction with the district's summer school program, has adopted a local high school, supported a Pearl Harbor Day observance with a school for at-risk youth called the Academy for Community Education, or ACE, visited a juvenile detention facility and taught students



A CLASS attendee tests herself with some pull-ups.



Capt. Tarnesha Covington from the Miami MEPS visits with a child at the Miami-Dade County Children's hospital.

a Brazilian martial art called capoeira. The MEPS plans to help out with a new program, Kids and the Power of Work, known as KAPOW, which is just getting started.

Add in support for Lids for Kids, which provides hats for children, the Marine Corps Toys for Tots program, a toy drive for the Miami Children's Hospital cancer ward, gathering school supplies for schools in Jamaica and taking part in the Hands on Miami where volunteers do community beautification projects.

Meanwhile, MEPS members active in the Federal Executive Board met people from the Veterans Affairs and became involved in a program called Tribute to Vets, which led to supporting a program called Forgotten Soldiers which in turn resulted in helping a local homeless shelter. The MEPS will also help raise funds for a new Fisher House in Miami that will provide housing for the families of hospitalized wounded warriors.

"Different avenues point in different directions. In the end, it's kind of circular,"

Lt. Cmdr. Rich Pokropski, Miami MEPS commander, said. "We do it because it's the right thing to do. We believe ambassadorship is one of our responsibilities.

"The people in the community are our friends," he said. "They need help. We can help. Getting involved with the community, being involved with the kids, makes you feel like you're alive."

ASVAB goes to CLASS

The Student Testing Program led to an association with Dr. Michelle Ferguson, the director of career education for the Miami-Dade County School District, who also established Committed Learners Always Striving for Success, known as CLASS.

Last year, the program attracted about 30 students. This year there were 1,300 and 130 of them took part in the "boot camp" conducted by the MEPS. The program is held in conjunction with the district's summer school program, according to Ferguson.



CLASS participants from the Miami-Dade County Schools go through part of their morning exercise routine.

“We developed a relationship over the last few years through the (Career Exploration Program) and exploring post-secondary education options,” she said. “The MEPS decided it could support the wellness portion of our program.”

Ferguson said the MEPS staff has been very supportive.

“They’ve been wonderful,” she said. “They’ve never turned us down and given their time at no cost. They have softened some of the financial difficulties for our schools.”

Capt. Barrary Lane, the MEPS executive officer, led the boot camp effort and said a lot of the credit for its success goes to the recruiters and seven MEPS staff members who volunteered.

“Kudos to our staff,” he said. “They’re always willing to get out there and help. The leadership allows people to go out and be part of the community. I’ve never had a supervisor tell me they wouldn’t let someone volunteer. That’s why we’re successful.”

The MEPS does benefit from supporting the CLASS program. All 1,300 students had to take the ASVAB to qualify, which gave a major boost to the Miami Student Testing Program.

Helping those at risk

Other programs reach out well to those who are heading for trouble or are already there.

The MEPS provided a color guard and Pokropski was the guest speaker for the Pearl Harbor Day observance at ACE, a Miami-Dade County school for at-risk youth.

“They asked us to come over,” Pokropski said. “I put on my whites and spoke about Pearl Harbor. I used to live in Hawaii, so I was familiar with the subject. It was a very good dialogue with the kids.”

Pokropski reached a little farther afield when he and the Tampa MEPS first sergeant visited the

Vision Quest Juvenile Intervention Facility, about 4 hours north of Miami. They provided career exploration information to the girls who were sent there in lieu of going to jail.



Capt. Tarnesha Covington poses with a mission worker in front of donated goods for the Miami Rescue Mission.

“They were all sent there for felonies,” Pokropski said, “everything from dealing drugs to grand theft auto. I started out by saying I was from Philadelphia, that I grew up in the hood. It seemed like half the girls in there were from my neighborhood in Philly.

“I told them I did bad stuff, too, when I was in the neighborhood, but I overcame it,” he said. I preached the value of an education — school, school, school. That got them thinking of about ways to be successful and you could tell some of them were making plans for the future before we left.”

Growth from within

Sometimes that snowball grows from the inside. Ivania Chavarria, the MEPS former secretary was so inspired by being involved in the first CLASS program that she went looking for more community outreach opportunities.

She found one at the Miami Children’s Hospital cancer ward.

“It wasn’t a high level command anything,” Pokropski said. “She took it as a personal project.”

The MEPS filled a van with toys and took them to the hospital to help brighten things up for the sick youngsters.

“The children’s hospital is heart wrenching,” said Pokropski who has taken over the program since Chavarria left. “The kids are so sick. They’re going through chemo. Some of them have to wear diapers and can’t even get out of bed.

“They like to see us in uniform,” he said. “When we give them a toy, they get happy and forget about their problems for a while.”

The MEPS kicked off its second toy drive in July and is looking to expand its donor pool to other organizations beyond the MEPS staff and area recruiters to gather more toys for the program.

“Once we have enough toys and wrap them, we’ll get a date cleared so we can take them (to the hospital),” Pokropski said. “Some days with really heavy treatment aren’t good, so we have to coordinate a good day.”



A child gets acquainted with Elmo.



Lt. Cmdr. Rich Pokropski, Miami MEPS commander, teaches capoeira, a Brazilian martial art, to Miami students.

VA widens the web

Helping the VA with its community projects led to taking part in other activities to benefit veterans and active duty military people, like the Tribute to Veterans and Forgotten Soldiers Outreach, Inc.

“We provided people for the Veterans Day celebration at the Dolphins’ game last year and there was an organization there called Forgotten Soldiers,” Pokropski said. The group collects notes from citizens and sends them to military people serving in Iraq and Afghanistan.

“We go to the football games in uniform on Sundays,” Pokropski said. “We get there a few hours before the game and, as the fans show up, we try to get them to write notes. Forgotten Soldiers sets up a booth outside the stadium. Some (fans) bring supplies to send to the troops and Forgotten Soldiers mails them out.”

Homeless get a hand

Through Forgotten Soldiers, the MEPS began volunteering for the Miami Rescue

Mission, which gets homeless people off the street, feeds and houses them, and provides an education program.

“We gather clothes for them and go out on Thanksgiving and volunteer on the food line,” Pokropski said. “One of the requirements for graduating from the education program is public speaking, so we give them a place to do that.

“They’re always in coats and ties for their speeches,” he said. “You’d never know they were homeless — they look more like businessmen — until they tell you their stories. We had one guy who started out with his name and said, ‘I’m homeless, I’m a crack addict and I’m HIV positive.’ He just laid it all out. It was pretty touching stuff.”

Reaching farther afield

The Miami MEPS isn’t content to contain its efforts to Miami, the state of Florida or even the United States.

A program directed by Master Sgt. Steven Jeffrey, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the medical section, reaches all the way to Jamaica.

Jeffrey lived in a poverty-stricken area of Jamaica until he was 10 and says, “I walked barefoot most of my life until I came to America.” His father, 10 brothers and sisters and almost countless nieces and nephews still live there and he returns often to visit.

Now in its second year, the effort has expanded from just school supplies and now includes some computers donated by various agencies and individuals.

Despite arriving nearly unannounced last year, Jeffrey, who planned on helping just one school ended up serving several schools and aiding more than 300 students.

“The Jamaica schools project shows how far our reach can go,” Pokropski said, “and we’re finding out our reach can go as far as we want it to.”

The amazing thing is that the Miami MEPS staff doesn’t know it’s doing anything extraordinary.

“For our people, it’s a pride builder and gets them the skills they need to establish relationships in the community,” Pokropski said.

And if a snowball fight ever breaks out, the Miami MEPS will be the best armed outfit in Dade County. Little community outreach snowballs grow into great big ones, but the size stays manageable if you just take one project at a time.

“

We do it because its the right thing to do. We believe ambassadorship is one of our responsibilities. The people in the community are our friends.

Lt. Cmdr. Rich Pokropski
Miami MEPS commander

”



A football fan takes a moment before a Dolphins game to jot a note to a military member serving in a combat zone. Coast Guard Lt. Cmdr. Rich Pokropski mans the booth.

Dallas MEPS reaches out to community

By Lt. Col. Denise Corley

The Dallas MEPS staff is reaching out to its community.

For several years, the MEPS has employed participants in the Workforce Recruitment Program for College Students with Disabilities summer hire program. Last year the MEPS employed two people through this program.

This year a partnership grew between Linda Wallace, a MEPS volunteer, Petty Officer 2nd Class Crystal Hopper, the MEPS readiness support group president, and Faye Hilton, a volunteer and donations coordinator for The Family Gateway in Dallas.

The Family Gateway provides shelter for families who are living on the streets and victims of domestic violence. It is a place where children can go for help and shelter without being separated from their parent.

The readiness support group members gathered enough school supplies from MEPS employees and liaisons to outfit MEPS employees' children and more than 66 homeless children (from pre-kindergarten to 12th grade) at the Dallas shelter. The children at the shelter heard about what was going on when the supplies were delivered and rushed outdoors to help unload the van!

One child with down syndrome asked, "How old do I have to be to join the military? Can I join today?" It provided a great start to getting a list of school supplies needed at the beginning of the school year. Wallace also volunteered at the MEPS through a program with her school, El Centro, which is within walking distance of the Dallas MEPS.

Wallace accomplished many great things as a volunteer for the MEPS. The walls are lined with art work drawn by visiting children of the newest members of the military.



Lt. Col. Denise Corley, former Dallas MEPS commander, and Linda Wallace, a MEPS volunteer, show the school supplies the MEPS collected for children who are homeless.

Wallace designed a business card that was produced with the help of Petty Officer 2nd Class Lola Lewis and made available to members of the MEPS to carry in their wallets. It provides addresses and phone numbers for nearby places where people who often approach the MEPS staff asking for handouts, can get a hot meal, employment support and shelter.

This simple project helps the person in need and allows the MEPS employee to avoid the nagging guilt of walking by without being able to provide immediate assistance. It is also a simple way to interact with or disengage from the panhandlers who simply take advantage of commuters and want money, often for drugs or alcohol, under the guise of asking for money for food.

Every Halloween the children of the government-run day care on the first floor of the federal building where the MEPS is located, take the elevator up for mutual entertainment by and for the children.

Employees pass out Halloween treats and the employees get a nice break sure to light a smile as the little ghosts and goblins hobble around with their Halloween bags.

Last winter the Dallas MEPS employees collected several pounds of coats, gloves, socks and winter essentials for the homeless veterans drive, a labor of love demonstrating from beginning to end we take care of our own.

HERE FOR YOU

Austin Street Shelter	2929 Hickory	214-428-4242
Dallas Life Foundation	1100 Cadiz	214-421-1380
Family Gateway	711 S. St. Paul	214-741-6515
Salvation Army	6500 Harry Hines	214-353-9622

These nearby organizations can provide to you a variety of assistance to help you!

A business card that allows MEPS staffers to direct people to agencies that can help them.

DATE: 1-29-08

DALLAS MEPS COLORING PROJECT

US CG

Name: Elizabeth

Age: 8

Relative to Applicant: Sister of the

U.S. (circle one) Air Force Army

Coast Guards Marines Navy

Artwork by applicants' young relatives decorate the walls of the Dallas MEPS.

Dallas MEPS, Red Cross form partnership

By Susie Goodwin
Dallas MEPS Secretary

Representatives of the Dallas Area American Red Cross and the Dallas MEPS teamed up to formalize a strong and valued partnership.

Cheryl Sutterfield-Jones, chief executive officer of the Dallas Area American Red Cross, Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr., USMEPCOM commander, Lt. Col. Denise Corley, former Dallas MEPS commander, Joe Benero, American Red Cross armed forces specialist, Betty Allen, a Red Cross volunteer since 1992, and a group of military shippers and their families gathered in the Dallas MEPS ceremony room June 4.

Capt. Scott Sobota, a Texas Army National Guard officer assigned to Dallas MEPS led an enlistment ceremony for a dozen young applicants swearing in with proud family members standing by with their cameras.

In fact, these family members drive the MEPS and American Red Cross union.

The Dallas MEPS, one of the busiest in the nation, encourages and welcomes family to take part in enlistment ceremonies and wait with their loved ones until boarding the bus for their trip to the airport and ultimate destination of their initial training with the military service of their choice.

The 10 a.m. enlistment ceremony was one of eight June 4 and one of more than 1,700 a year that represent the reason the Dallas MEPS enjoys dedicated and warm support of volunteers such as Allen. She has served thousands of hours, many at the Dallas MEPS for the newest military members and their families.

Allen and several more just like her are at the MEPS when it opens bright and early. The team serves hot coffee, cold punch, cookies and warm smiles, and provides information on the emergency communication services provided by the American Red Cross across the nation for service members and their families.

The idea is to introduce the families to the American Red Cross at the very beginning of the process, before crisis hits, so if the Red Cross' services are needed the connection is made. The enlistment officers have the shippers fill out family address cards and the American Red Cross mails to them information regarding their military services.

There is rarely a day that mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, husbands, wives,

aunts and uncles aren't sitting in one of the waiting areas of the MEPS to share in the enlistment ceremony and say their final goodbye to the newest military member of their families.

Tears of anxiety, pride, fear and happiness are common on the faces of the applicants' parents, friends and family. The American Red Cross table, decorations, beverages and cookies make the atmosphere inviting and family friendly.

The Dallas Area Chapter of the American Red Cross is one of the largest and most dynamic chapters in the nation, serving 4.1 million people in 12 north Texas counties.

The chapter has more than 3,000 volunteers. It helps people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies through a wide range of services, from disaster relief to health and safety classes.

Sutterfield-Jones has shown leadership in reorganizing the Red Cross to meet current funding needs.

She arranged and implemented disaster relief efforts after Dallas' 2004 flooding and organized and implemented the nation's second largest sheltering and assistance effort for 25,000 evacuees after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

But she wants people to know that the Red Cross meets local needs daily. If there is a fire or a kid's swimming class, the Red Cross is there.

Sutterfield-Jones is a leader in human services management, and often makes presentations at national, state and local

venues on multi-disciplinary team strategies, collaboration and non-profit management. She consults on non-profit and board development and strategic planning. She is active in the community and serves on many boards and commissions.

In 2003, she was named Agency Executive of the Year by the United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, and was honored by the Girl Scouts of Tejas Council with the Real Girls, Real Women Award in 2005.

Joseph Benero is the military service specialist for the Dallas Area Red Cross and a retired Marine colonel with 25 years' active duty and Reserve service.

In the first quarter of the year, Benero's team, the chapter's service to the armed forces program briefed almost 1,800 service members and their families regarding Red Cross service to the military, including a new mental health initiative.

The team has met with many military family support groups, veterans' associations and community groups to acquaint them with the Red Cross services to the military and their families.

Benero continues to serve his nation through the American Red Cross and is helping USMEPCOM connect with his counterparts in any of the 64 other MEPS that do not have an American Red Cross partnership, but would like to establish one. An exciting flurry of coordination and activity is already in progress across the nation in dozens of other MEPS.



Betty Allen, a Red Cross volunteer since 1992; Col. Mariano C. Campos Jr., USMEPCOM commander; Cheryl Sutterfield-Jones, chief executive officer of the Dallas Area American Red Cross; Lt. Col. Denise Corley, former Dallas MEPS commander; and Joe Benero, American Red Cross military service specialist. *Photo by Ralph Navarro*

Tampa builds bridges to local students

By Myra M. Ellis,
Tampa MEPS Test Coordinator

The Tampa MEPS hosted a job shadow day to “build bridges to a secure tomorrow through family, leadership ambassadorship and growth.”

That motto, from Lt. Cmdr. Nicole DeRamus, MEPS commander, is an adaptation of the philosophy adopted by Col. Barrye L. Price, Eastern Sector commander.

The plan was to give back to Tampa’s youth and build a bridge to a local private school, Tampa Bay Christian Academy, and its senior students. Many factors came into play while encouraging students’ development.

The project’s aim was to make an impact on the students’ lives, to develop and execute a shadow program that highlighted the MEPS’ professionalism, patriotism and importance.

The overall purpose was to give the students a better understanding of what happens behind “Freedom’s Front Door.”

DeRamus, Maj. Chad Vaughn, Maj. Reinaldo Montero and 1st Sgt. Doniphan Rios headed up the event.

Twenty-five seniors, the school administrator and the high school principal arrived early in the morning and went to the testing room for a briefing. After an introduction by the command staff, the students learned about the ASVAB Student Testing Program.

Vaughn explained how the career exploration tool could help the students find career possibilities by coupling their skills with an interest inventory.

The students learned how the ASVAB can be a first step in going from the civilian world to joining the ranks of others that have walked through “Freedom’s Front Door.”

The students divided into four groups, led by the command team, to help provide the best possible experience and personalize the program. Each leader walked the students through a different part of the MEPS.

“We really helped these students understand they have to qualify to become a military member, you cannot just get in (the service) because you want to,” Montero said. “You have to put effort into your future, and joining the military is not just a simple task as it seems from the outside.”

The groups visited each MEPS section, got a briefing, and asked questions. In

the processing section they got hands-on experience in fingerprinting, filing procedures, the human resources briefings and visited packet breakdown.

“This day was a terrific experience to be able to show not only the students, but their families, that being a military member is much more than just a job,” Jaime Lapeyrouse, a human resources assistant, said. “It takes a lot to put on the uniform and the military members are so much more than just there to fight a war.”

The medical section gave more hands-on guidance. Technicians demonstrated a blood draw.

Vaughn Beckham, a medical technician, noticed that one student wasn’t handling watching the blood draw well and caught him before he fell to the floor. The other students thought it was funny, but they hadn’t considered that these things often happen at the MEPS during applicant processing. It turned out to be a real eye-opener for the students.

In the testing section, Jim Davisson, test control officer, spoke about being the longest-serving civilian employee at the MEPS and changes that he has seen over the years.

Alberto Velasquez, test score technician, discussed how important it is to work hard and to have goals. The testing section explained the ASVAB helps determine which jobs will be open to them if they decide to join the military.

“We are giving these students hope that there is a positive future for them,” Velasquez said. “They should persevere.”

A stop in headquarters rounded out the visit.

“We touched on the ‘three R’s’ – reading, writing and arithmetic,” Melba Majerus, command secretary, said. “We wanted the students to understand the importance in learning these three areas. We also pushed technology. Computer knowledge is so important in the future of these students.”

“I really believe that we opened some student’s eyes on job shadow day,” Dwayne Aughey, supply technician, said. “Most civilians have no idea what it is we do to protect our country. It was a great experience for these kids to see the other side and what it is like.”

Aughey explained his position and responsibilities at the Tampa MEPS to the students.

The budget technician and assistant budget technician explained the importance of math and computers to their jobs, which hit a home run with the school administrator and principal, since it reinforced what the students were learning in class.

The liaisons spoke about their individual services with the students, explaining how each has unique training and qualification standards.

Students watched an enlistment ceremony where the transition from civilian to “troop” is made. The emotion and importance in the ceremony left a lasting impression on the students.

Before lunch, the visitors competed in physical training by doing Army push-ups, Marine Corps pull-ups and flexed arm hangs, Navy sit-ups and the step-up part of the Army’s Assessment of Recruit Motivation and Strength, or ARMS, test. It



A student tries out the Army’s Assessment of Recruit Motivation and Strength — ARMS — Test.

was an eye-opening experience for most as they sweated through the competition.

Vaughn stepped up to the chin up bar to show the students how to properly do a pull-up, and DeRamus demonstrated the flexed-arm hang and sit-ups. They saw the importance of keeping healthy and staying fit.

After the workout, the students were rewarded with all the pizza they could eat.

At the end of the day, the exhausted students were escorted back into the testing room, where they were each recognized for their physical performance.

The top performers won backpacks, T-shirts, pencils and other items donated by the services. The students were excited about the awards and talked about what the day at the MEPS meant for them.

The teachers who accompanied the students also commented about the experience. No student left the MEPS empty-handed.

The Tampa MEPS takes pride in building bridges in the community and developing strong relationships with the community. DeRamus believes that strong community involvement and advocacy opens doors to bigger and better things for the Tampa MEPS staff members and their families.



Students do push-ups during a physical training competition held as part of a job shadow program at the Tampa MEPS.

It also lets the community see first-hand the professionalism of MEPS personnel through their active mentoring, coaching and leading of tomorrow's leaders.

DeRamus uses the job shadow day as a catalyst for the command's Ambassador Leadership Institute to bridge local middle and high school students to the leadership, training and experience of area business, civic and military leaders through partnership with Junior Achievement.

Students will be challenged to develop leadership skills through Responsibility, Ambassadorship, Leadership and Integrity, or RALI.

Tampa Bay Christian Academy will serve as the pilot project for the RALI Junior Achievement program next school year, with the program eventually being offered at a local public high school and middle school.

The relationship developed by bringing the students and teachers into the Tampa MEPS will encourage and develop these students in the future.

The Tampa MEPS is regularly involved in the community. Some of its community projects include the Meals on Wheels program, donations to support the troops at Fisher House, donations for abused children and a Wounded Warrior event.

Rios is supporting new projects to promote community support and involvement.

The Tampa MEPS staff is always looking for ways to give back to the community. From being a good neighbor to opening "Freedom's Front Door," the Tampa MEPS is making it part of the a safer and better place to live.



Job shadow participants take a shot at doing Navy-style sit-ups as they get a feel for what types of physical fitness the military requires.

Portland volunteer leads by example; seven others follow

It was National Volunteer Week and Michael Williams felt he had to get involved in the community.

Williams, the information technology specialist at the Portland, Ore., MEPS, had been a volunteer with the first USMEPCOM Wellness Symposium and wanted to contribute more to his community.

Williams joined seven other people at the MEPS and began participating in Meals On Wheels once a week for the local Loaves & Fishes Center.

The Loaves & Fishes Center in Portland was founded in a church basement in 1970 by three women who recognized a need to serve a hot lunch to about a dozen senior citizens, and then delivered 14 “meals on wheels” on paper plates wrapped in newspaper.

Today, with a 14,000-square-foot kitchen, the center produces 5,000 hot meals five days a week, and delivers them to 35

senior centers throughout the metropolitan area.

Williams became one of 450 volunteers who either prepare or deliver the meals in 2005. He is the only one of the original eight volunteers who signed up for the “Adopt-A-Route Program” — which commits to deliver on the same route, once a week, for a year. Every Wednesday he packs up ice chests, picks up the lunches, which provide one-third to one-half of an older adult’s daily nutrition requirement, and visits 15-20 members of his “family.”

“I cannot imagine not seeing these people every week,” Williams said, “For some, I am the only visitor they get that day. It has made a lasting impact on my life, and my views toward community service.”

The partnership with Loaves & Fishes is encouraged and supported whole-heartedly by Maj. Curt Steinagel, former MEPS commander, who believes that the visible connection to the



Michael Williams gets ready to make another run on his weekly Meals On Wheels” route.

community is crucial to not only the success of the mission, but also for personal growth and individual development.

Williams said he “feels strongly about the relationship between personal, professional, and community responsibilities in his life — that each area supports and nourishes the other.”

On top of the two hours a week delivering meals, he has coached youth soccer, and spends an additional two to four hours a week volunteering for his church assisting with youth, mentoring young adults, preparing Mass, or visiting the elderly and sick in care facilities.

“It’s our duty to maintain a commitment to other people in our lives,” he said.

Last year he got some help from some like-minded individuals. Staff Sgt. Kristyn Caputo, USMEPCOM’s Military Member of the Year, joined him in visiting his “family.” Also getting into the spirit is Williams’ father-in-law, Michael Lakey Sr., a retired Army captain, and his oldest daughter, Jaylynn, who volunteers across the river in nearby Vancouver, Wash., through her employer.

“I’m very proud of her choice to start driving,” Williams said. “Who knows? Maybe the others will start delivering, too.”



Curt Martin, head chef at the Cherry Blossom Center, prepares meals for delivery.

Jackson lends a hand to Junior ROTC

Jackson MEPS reached out to a local high school to conduct leadership training for the Junior ROTC program in late July.

Retired Col. Paul L. Willis, director of Army instruction for Jackson Public Schools, asked the MEPS staff to lend a hand and Maj. Jennifer Hicks-McGowan answered the call to participate in the Summer Leadership and Staff Development Seminar hosted in Jackson, Miss.

“The cadets who participate are some of the best performers in the Junior ROTC program, are generally among the best students in their respective schools and are also among the most likely students to go on to college upon graduation,” Willis said.

Hicks-McGowan was happy to help out, especially since Willis is one of the main supporters of the Jackson MEPS Career Exploration Program.

“Without the support of Colonel Willis and his Junior ROTC high school students, it would be extremely difficult for the Jackson MEPS to reach its

Student Testing Program goals,” Hicks-McGowan said.

In keeping with the Eastern Sector commander, Col. Barry Price’s Family, Leadership, Ambassadorship and Growth doctrine, Hicks-McGowan was a MEPS ambassador when she represented the Army and the command during the seminar.

“The Army uses the Army values — loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity and personal courage to describe leadership, which is also known as ‘LDRSHIP’ throughout the Army ranks,” Hicks-McGowan told the cadets.

Master Sgt. Bryan Plummer, Jackson MEPS senior enlisted advisor, also attended the seminar.

“I really had a great time working with the cadets because they were energetic and eager to learn,” Plummer said.

Hicks-McGowan explained why it was important for the MEPS to support the program.

“We have a responsibility to serve as MEPS ambassadors to the local community, especially the youth,” she said



Jackson Public Schools Junior ROTC cadets listen during a presentation at the Jackson MEPS.

There are nine inner city high schools in the Jackson Public Schools Junior ROTC program, which is among one of the largest programs in Mississippi and serves several hundred students.

“Leadership and character development is our focus as well as highlighting the importance of developing leadership skills and strong character traits and how a good education, especially a college education, can help prepare one for successful living,” Willis said.

Hicks-McGowan said the MEPS can play a key role in developing the student’s abilities.

“The youth are the future leaders of this nation and they must be trained, mentored and educated in order to be more than prepared to face some very difficult challenges ahead,” she said.

“The leaders of today should feel compelled to share their experiences and the wealth of knowledge they have personally received during leadership training over the years,” Hicks-McGowan added.

In preparing for the speech, Hicks-McGowan said that although she was the sender of information, she would need

to imagine herself being the recipient of the information and from there she could best determine what approach to take.

Hicks-McGowan asked the cadets to stand up, show their spirit and participate in marching to cadence laced with the Army values and words of inspiration and encouragement necessary for a future leader, whether in the military or a civilian profession.

“I felt that this would be a memorable way and an effective approach for the cadets to receive leadership training,” she said.

The cadets were given time to work in groups and conduct a brainstorming activity to develop their own list of what traits a good leader must have as well as the traits they have seen in bad leaders.

The cadets were asked to identify the leaders they most admire and explain why. Many selected their own leader, Willis, which is a testament to the positive influence and leadership example that he has set for them.

Hicks-McGowan plans to continue the MEPS involvement in programs or events to support Junior ROTC initiatives that contribute to the young people’s leadership training and growth.



Maj. Jennifer Hicks-McGowan, Jackson MEPS commander, makes a point while addressing Junior ROTC cadets.

New York MEPS captain assumes sad task; escorts friend's body home to Puerto Rico

By Skip Wiseman
Messenger Associate Editor

It was the end of another long day at the New York MEPS in April and Capt. Carlos E. Rivera, the operations officer, was finishing up as he usually does — by checking the online version of his hometown paper in Puerto Rico.

That's how he found out that one of his best friends, Capt. Ulises Burgos-Cruz, had been killed April 6 by a roadside bomb just north of Baghdad.

"I was reading a local newspaper about five o'clock on a Tuesday," Rivera recalled. "I was about to close my office and go home. Every day, I open the newspaper from home. His face popped up as breaking news."

First Sgt. Cynthia Walker, then the MEPS senior enlisted advisor, used to work at the casualty affairs office in the Pentagon.

"She called up there and they, unfortunately, confirmed his death," Rivera said. "He had recently been back for R&R," Rivera said. "He had like two months left in Iraq."

The two captains and their wives had been close since the soldiers attended Field

Artillery Basic School at Fort Sill, Okla., eight years earlier. Now one of the four was gone, his widow three months pregnant with a child he would never meet.

"We kept in touch wherever I was stationed," Rivera said. "He and his wife were good friends with my wife and me. My wife spoke with his wife and told her we were there if she needed anything."

The family asked Rivera to escort his friend's body home to Puerto Rico.

"They were going to send another captain from the unit," Rivera said, "but the family preferred someone he knew do it."

He went to Dover Air Force Base, Del., identified his friend's remains and escorted the body home to Puerto Rico. Once there, he was faced with another difficult task. Someone had to open the casket so the family could view the body and decide whether it would be an open or closed casket funeral.

"Nobody else would do it, so I had to," Rivera said. "Fortunately, the remains were viewable."

Rivera had one more concern about escorting his friend's body home — Puerto Ricans, like much of the country — are sharply divided in their feelings toward the war.

"I was really afraid to go to San Juan and do the motorcade," Rivera said. "There are some negative feelings there. There have been 70 casualties from Puerto Rico. Every time a hero comes home in this condition there are two sides — the pro-military and the mothers against the war."

"I was afraid there would be protests, but people were cheering him," Rivera said. "There was a police escort all the way. I was happy to see a lot of people loved him. He was a man of character and a good example for young soldiers coming out of Puerto Rico to follow."

Rivera said he will most remember his friend's strong religious belief.

"He was a man of God," he said. "You don't find people like him too often. He was a soldier, but his dedication to God was second to none. He was always organizing things at church, teaching music to kids, stuff like that."

Although it wasn't pleasant, it was a privilege, Rivera said,

"It was one of the greatest honors I've had in my military career," he said. "The whole process was handled well. It's not fun to do those sorts of things, but we got great support from America — military and civilians."

Atlanta hosts Solid Rock Academy

by Sgt. Michael Sagna

Atlanta MEPS reached out to its community when it hosted a job shadow program for 10 high school students from Solid Rock Academy.

Atlanta MEPS Commander, Lt. Col. Harriet Jackson welcomed the students and gave them an overview of military processing. Also, the students took a tour of the MEPS and listened to presentations, including one on the Geneva and Hague conventions and another on interservice cooperation during Hurricane Katrina.

Coast Guardsman, Petty Officer 2nd Class Daniel Wimberley shared his experience of being part of the rescue effort following Hurricane Katrina. Petty Officer 1st Class Robert Blount conveyed some of his experiences as a fleet marine force corpsman in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Senior Master Sgt. Anthony Woods, Atlanta MEPS senior enlisted advisor, treated the students to a first-rate lunch.

Atlanta MEPS staff members, many of whom have children in the high school, were thrilled to see the students and expressed excitement when explaining the impact of their work. Some of the students commented that they were amazed at the volume of applicants that are processed on a daily basis.



(Inset) Solid Rock Academy students and Atlanta MEPS staff pose for a photo.



Petty Officer 2nd Class Daniel Wimberley, a Coast Guardsman, tells the Solid Rock Academy students about taking part in the Hurricane Katrina relief effort.

Oklahoma City takes 'A Run to Remember'

The Oklahoma City MEPS staff supported the Oklahoma City Memorial by taking part in the 8th Annual Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, "A Run to Remember April 27."

The event commemorates the April 1995 bombing of the Oklahoma City Federal Building.

Banners bearing the names of the 168 people who died in the bombing were displayed on the marathon route.

The event is organized by the Oklahoma City Memorial, which is on the former grounds of the Murrah Federal Building.

The memorial features an outdoor monument honoring

those who died and the dedication of the people of Oklahoma and the world to renounce all forms of terrorism.

The memorial also features a museum that educates visitors on the bombing and a center for the prevention of terrorism.

The MEPS had several participants. Civilian employees Toni Grant, Michele Caravello, Virginia Burtcher, Julie Murray, Debbie Cannon and Cassandra Dodd were joined by Petty Officer 2nd Class April Pratt, in the five kilometer walk.

The MEPS command team completed the 26.2-mile marathon. Lt. Cmdr. David Nikodym, 44, Capt. Tim Bryant, 41, Capt. Lee Gray, 27, and



Left to right: 1st Sgt. Anthony Schmoker, Capt. Tim Bryant, Capt. Lee Gray and Lt. Cmdr. David Nikodym.

1st Sgt. Anthony Schmoker, 37, all completed their first marathon.

Nikodym had challenged the others to train and complete the event. Bryant became the group's motivator and trainer,

and the four trained intensely for more than four months.

The group completed the marathon in just over five and a half hours and crossed the finish line as a group.

Spokane joins thousands for Bloomsday Run

Why would nearly 44,000 people gather in downtown Spokane, Wash., early on a Sunday morning when they could still be sleeping in or enjoying some down time at a local coffee shop? Because it was time for the 32nd Annual Lilac



Capt. Von Astudillo, Leaf Rich, Greg Johnson, Don Jones Lt. Cmdr Richard Obregon, Sgt. 1st Class Donald Buckley, Dr. Diane Rubin, Ed MacMaster and Dorothy Yeager

Bloomsday Run (jog, walk or crawl) which consists of a 12-kilometer course of unforgiving asphalt that weaves its way through the city with local bands entertaining and motivating "Bloomies" (race participants) at every mile. The course also boasts a three-quarter-mile-long mountain climb nicknamed "Doomsday Hill" and numerous out-of-towners and locals wearing outrageous costumes!

In the spirit of teamwork and camaraderie, the Spokane MEPS staff, family members and service liaisons participated as either volunteers (brown shirts) or participants (red shirts).

The MEPS team consisted of Lt. Cmdr. Richard Obregon, commander, Capt. Von Astudillo, operations officer, Sgt. 1st Class Donald Buckley, operations NCOIC, Leaf Rich, test control officer, Dr. Diane Rubin,

chief medical officer, Greg Johnson and Ed MacMaster, human resources assistants, Don Jones, test clerk, Dorothy Yeager, lead human resources assistant, Lori Willard, information technology specialist, and 1st Sgt. Terrence Williams.

The Bloomsday race is a tradition that marks the beginning of spring in the Inland Northwest and is part of various local events culminating in the Lilac Festival Parade later in the month.

Five-time contestant Dorothy Yeager was the inspiration behind the high participation rate for the Spokane staff. Yeager is energized by the physical fitness regime she follows to prepare for race day and thoroughly enjoys the atmosphere created by more than 40,000 excited people with the common goal of starting, competing — and most important — finishing this fun event.

Pull harder!

The Milwaukee MEPS staff digs in during the Organization Day tug of war. The MEPS held its first Commander's Cup May 30 as part of the day. The Commander's Cup events were basketball, bocce ball and tug of war. Headquarters and the processing, medical and testing elements competed against each other. Testing took first place. The day was an "esprit de corps" occasion full of barbecuing, sports events and personnel recognition.



FORT DIX MEPS



Expeditionary Center commander enlists airmen at Fort Dix

Above: Maj. Gen. Kip Self, U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center commander, administers the oath of enlistment to five Air Force enlistees at the Fort Dix MEPS. Right: Self signs enlistment papers for Nicole Kazimer, who is the daughter of Master Sgt. Joe Kazimer of the center's 421st Combat Training Squadron and Tech. Sgt. Karyn Kazimer of the 108th Air Refueling Wing, McGuire Air Force Base, N.J. *U.S. Air Force photos by Tech. Sgt. Scott T. Sturkol*



SPECIAL VISITORS

Governor's husband visits Seattle to see current military processing

Mike Gregoire, husband of Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire, visited the Seattle MEPS to see today's enlistment process from an applicant's perspective.

The first gentlemen served in combat in Vietnam as a second lieutenant. He and the governor are determined advocates for Washington service members.

Gregoire arrived at 5:45 a.m. to see how applicants were received off the bus. He toured testing, medical and operations from the standpoint of an applicant.

The "First Mike," as he prefers to be called, got the complete MEPS experience including getting his fingerprints taken by Sgt. 1st Class John Joiner, NCOIC of operations.

ANCHORAGE MEPS



Husband and wife team join the Guard

Brigadier Gen. Thomas Katkus, commander of the Alaska Army National Guard, enlists Krystal Thibault and re-enlists her husband, Staff Sgt. Joseph Thibault. Both enlisted in the Guard — Krystal to become a public affairs specialist. Her husband is a noncommissioned officer with the guard. *Photo by Karima Turner, Alaska Army National Guard*

BOISE MEPS



Couple choose to serve together to open doors

It is not uncommon to have family members of applicants at the MEPS. There is also nothing unusual about one spouse watching the other swear into the armed services. But on June 5, Cody Breckenridge did more than watch his wife, Kayla, enlist at the Boise MEPS. He enlisted, too. The Breckenridges decided to join the Idaho National Guard "to open doors for our future." They both enlisted as ammunition specialists and said that it was "a journey we wanted to take together." Capt. Roderick Gray, Boise MEPS operations officer, conducted the ceremony.

At the end of his visit, Gregoire commented on how much the process had changed since he was drafted during the Vietnam era. His

comments reiterate that the Red Carpet service the MEPS provides has made a difference in an applicant's overall experience.



Dunston takes command of Western Sector

Colonel Mariano C. Campos Jr., USMEPCOM commander (center), passes the flag to USMEPCOM's incoming Western Sector commander, Col. Charles Dunston. The ceremony took place July 30 at the Recruit Training Command's Midway Ceremonial Drill Hall, Naval Station Great Lakes. Dunston is a 32-year veteran of the Marine Corps and his last assignment was III Marine Expeditionary Force where he served as chief of staff. USMEPCOM's Western Sector includes 31 MEPS that are located west of the Mississippi River, including those in Honolulu and Anchorage. Outgoing Western Sector commander (right) Capt. Keith Barton will next serve as congressional liaison, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Washington, D.C. *Photo by Art Heintz*

Chief of Staff of the Army visits Minneapolis



The Chief of Staff of the Army, Gen. George Casey visited the Minneapolis MEPS on May 23. He was in town for a University of Minnesota Army ROTC commissioning and a meeting. Here, Casey talks with David White, Minneapolis MEPS lead health technician, during a tour of the MEPS. Also during his time at the MEPS, Casey personally thanked the applicants he met for joining the military.

EQUALITY

Jacksonville hears from city councilwoman

Applicants, staff, and liaisons at the Jacksonville MEPS had the chance to hear local city councilwoman Glorious Johnson speak at its Black History Month celebration.



Jacksonville City Councilwoman Glorious Johnson speaks to the MEPS staff and applicants.

Processing operations were stopped and all hands gathered in the applicant waiting area for the final event of the month-long celebration.

The event kicked off with a soulful, jazz sax version of Amazing Grace by Petty Officer 1st Class Jerry Daniels from the Navy liaison office. First Sgt. Stephen Stugart, Jacksonville MEPS senior enlisted advisor, introduced the guest speaker.

Johnson, a lifelong educator, spoke on the Black History Month theme of Carter G. Woodson and the Origins of Multiculturalism. Throughout her speech highlighting the contributions of many famous African-Americans, Johnson paused to test the audience's retention of her key points, often bringing a laugh as it seemed reminiscent of a grade school teacher.

The thought-provoking lesson illustrated the importance of Woodson's work and

the aim of multiculturalism to be more than a showcase of diversity, but rather a celebration of the human spirit.

Captain Kennethra Edwards, Jacksonville MEPS executive officer, thanked Johnson with gifts from each service and a certificate of appreciation from the MEPS.

After the councilwoman's remarks, the celebration continued with a luncheon featuring a variety of local, southern and soul dishes.

Kevin Doyle, the state outreach director for U.S. Sen. Mel Martinez, also attended and extended his thanks to Johnson for her community support and the MEPS staff for its hard work and dedication on behalf of the senator.

The day's events concluded with everyone getting to meet and thank the special guests who took time out of their busy schedules to help make the event a success.



El Paso MEPS
Maj. Matt Burton

Hometown: Houston

Fond childhood memories: “My brother and I built a helicopter. It lifted off the ground one inch. If I would have had the resources, I could probably have gotten it to fly. We also tried to build a plane.”

One of 13: He’s from a family of 13 children — 12 boys and one girl. (Yes, she’s spoiled) “I was the third from the youngest. I couldn’t get away with anything at school because everybody knew my family. They’d always say ‘He’s one of the Burton boys.’”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? “My cap gun. I still love cowboy movies and always played the cowboy with my brothers.”

Education: Prairie View A&M, bachelor of science degree in industrial technology. Industrial technology merges people and manufacturing, from human resources to working with engineers to repair or change out parts.

Why Army? “I had a brother who was in ROTC. I admired him and wanted to follow in his footsteps. While I was in high school I signed up for the Marines but my father encouraged me to explore the Army or the Air Force through ROTC because he thought it would give me more opportunities.” His father was an aircraft mechanic who once worked on the Enola Gay, the

B-29 bomber that dropped the first atomic bomb.

Previous assignment: Brigade human resources officer with the 130th Engineer Brigade in Germany.

How did your time at USMEPCOM headquarters help prepare you for commanding a MEPS?

“Knowing how the headquarters works, especially the resource management side of the house. It helped me see the big picture at the headquarters that subordinate commanders might not understand. I go to conferences and hear commanders complain about things, but it’s only because they don’t know how the headquarters operates.”

Favorite assignment: “It depends on how you look at it. I was an observer-controller at the National Training Center. I enjoyed that from a training aspect. From a personnel aspect, being a brigade human resources officer and the theater engineer brigade human resources officer. You impact a lot of people that way.”

Future military career plans: “I would like to work on a division staff as a personnel officer, working with different staff agencies and filling those personnel demands to make sure those subordinate units are outfitted with the right personnel.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I want to be an entrepreneur/inventor. There are things I want to try once I complete my military career. I foresee having a couple of products out there for sale.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “Between going to school to complete my master of business administration degree, I spend a lot of time with my family outdoors. I like to drive. The scenery in El Paso is a little different with all the desert, but there are places to

go where you can see things in 2-3 hours.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “Show care and concern for them. It’s something I’ve always done. If you show care and concern you can inspire them to do anything. If they don’t care, then you just have to kick their butts.”

What do you like best about your job? “I enjoy talking with the applicants and encouraging them to do whatever it takes to get in. If they need some motivation, I try to do that, when they’re about to ship out, I encourage them to continue their education while they’re in the military. I’ve had quite a few of them come back and introduce me to their parents. I feel I touched them in some way when they do that.”

What do you order when you eat out? I try to order something with spinach whether it raw or cooked. I like spinach with pine nuts, stuffed spinach, whatever.

What’s your guilty pleasure? “Chocolate — and it shows. I love chocolate. I try to avoid it, but somehow it finds its way back to me.”

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off the television? “When people use the term hero in the wrong way. Hero is sometimes used to describe anyone who has been in the military. I don’t see it that way. We use that term too loosely.”

What would people be surprised to know about you? “Most people who know me would be surprised to know I’m an introvert. I’m not a loner, but they would be surprised to know I can be by myself and enjoy the quiet. People who get to know me think I’m an extrovert, but I’m really not.”

Three things on his desk: “A little monkey puppet one of my workers gave to me, a ship that one of my employees brought back from Mexico

and a pen and pencil set from a company that wanted to hire me. It reminds me of life after the military.”

One thing always on his desk: “My engineer coaster. I came in as an engineer and that’s where my heart is. I’m a combat engineer.

What’s the last book you read? “‘The World is Flat.’ It’s about globalization, how we’re dependent on other countries and how we’re outsourcing everything. It talks about how to lift third world countries out of poverty and how it would affect the world socially and politically.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “Going to the Canary Islands. I’ve been to one of the Majorca Islands off the coast of Spain and enjoyed that. The water in the Canary Islands is luscious as near as I can tell from the photos.”



Tampa MEPS
Lt. Cmdr.
Nicole DeRamus

Hometown: Montgomery, Ala. “It’s a very large, sleepy town. It has a small town atmosphere.” (It’s about 500,000 people.)

Fond childhood memories: “The most exciting times were when the state fair came to town and you had the opportunity to ride the amusement park rides and you also got to get as much sugar in you as you could without being chastised.”

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid?

“Weebils, they wobble but they don’t fall down. As hard as you tried to knock them down, they always popped right back up. The life lesson is no matter how many hits you take, you pull yourself back up and stay in the game and push farther ahead.”

Education: Bachelor of industrial engineering degree, Auburn University.

Why engineering? “I first got interested in it in 8th grade when I was encouraged to think about engineering by a computer science teacher. When I was a freshman in high school, I had to do a paper on careers in English class and locked onto industrial engineering. In IE, you have an opportunity to interact with people, but you’re using math and science and all that fun stuff. A lot of people don’t think of that as fun, but that’s what I enjoy.”

Why Navy? “I started out Marine Corps on a Navy and Marine Corps scholarship with a Marine Corps option. I switched over to Navy when I was in college. I knew the Army wasn’t for me. I considered the Air Force, but the Navy offered some of the finest traditions and offered me the opportunity to do something technical in nature, see the world and travel. And I love the water. I have a cousin who is a retired Navy commander. He speaks very highly of the Navy and the experience he had and that shaped my opinion of the Navy.”

Previous assignment: Executive officer at Naval Technical Training Center at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. The Master at Arms School and Corrections Academy are there. The Corrections Academy is joint service.

How was your time with the Air Force? “I came to appreciate the professionalism of the Air Force, but I still left

with the overall impression that I made the right decision to join the Navy. I had 13 years of bias. I ended up at the MEPS to expand on the joint experience and learn from the other service cultures.”

Favorite assignment: “I’m in my favorite assignment. This is my eighth duty station in my 15 years. You learn and grow as an individual in every assignment, but this assignment represents another level of growth. You learn so much in this job, meeting family members, the generations who have served in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Desert Storm. I can’t tell you how many people have thanked me for my service, when I should be thanking them for setting the bar. Seeing them coming in to support that grandchild, or niece or nephew who continued the tradition. Even the applicants who come in and stand alone have made up their minds that they’re going to join the military while the nation is at war and that they might end up in harm’s way. They show the courage to make that decision.”

Future military career plans: “I intend to continue to enjoy the service I provide here, but also hope to have greater opportunities at the command level and higher when I leave here.”

What do you want to be when you grow up? “I want to be an educator. I mean that in two different ways. I’m working on my Ph.D in education and want to be able to go into a college atmosphere. But I also see myself as an educator every day, whether it’s with my son and his classmates, Junior Achievement, or a post-test interpretation for ASVAB. We have to start developing leaders well before college age. Leadership lessons can begin in middle school.”

What do you do when you’re not a commander? “We’re always on, but when I am outside of the command,

I spend time with my son and all his activities, basketball, soccer, science experiments and guitar. When I’m not doing that, I’m working on my Ph.D.”

What’s the best way to inspire the troops? “All hands on deck. That is, to not have the sense you’re above your folks, but to be able to jump in and work alongside them, whether fingerprinting applicants, working the control desk, whatever, to get the mission done.”

What do you like best about your job? “The people. Because our philosophy here is we operate as a team but function as a family. There are no sectional rivalries. There are a very good relationship with the liaisons, because we help each other out and enjoy ourselves. If we can’t enjoy ourselves when we step through this door, we’re doing something wrong.”

What do you order when you eat out? “It depends on the restaurant but I absolutely have to have calamari a couple of times a month. Some people crave chocolate. I crave calamari.”

What’s your guilty pleasure? Lemon raspberry cheesecake.

What’s guaranteed to make you turn off TV? “Because I watch a lot of news channels, biased reporting. It doesn’t matter what their political inclinations are, just biased reporting. It’s difficult to find unbiased reporting.” She regards Tim Russert’s death a great loss because he was one of a few interviewers who didn’t seem to have his own agenda.

What would people be surprised to know about you? “That I have an adventurous and a silly side. I play practical jokes and no one ever suspects that it was me. When I was in (Washington,) D.C., I shared a cubicle with a guy I went to Auburn with. We would give each other a hard

time. I always said, ‘Wait until your farewell.’ Every time he would share an embarrassing story with me, and I would catalogue it. I had about 10 things that I weaved together for his farewell luncheon. He was the quiet type, so everybody was saying ‘Mike did that?’ We were all in stitches because nobody could believe he’d done those things. He tried to deny them, but he was laughing so hard his face turned all red.”

Three things always on her desk: “My planner, an inspirational book and a foldout brochure on the Saturn Sky. That’s my dream car. It’s a convertible, it’s a very sexy car.”

What are you reading right now? “‘Good to Great.’ It talks about what distinguishes good leaders from great leaders.”

What’s your ideal vacation? “The beach, preferably on a Caribbean island and being able to swim, snorkel, fish, all of that, and just enjoy the view.”



Boise MEPS
Maj. Connie May

Hometown: Topeka, Kan. “I was born in Arizona, but I call Topeka home. It’s not nearly as exciting as Boise.”

Fond childhood memories: “Playing softball when I was a kid, going to Dairy Queen and my Grandma’s baking.”

Helping Grandma can: “She canned jellies and things,

tomatoes. She also froze vegetables. We always had lima beans, we always had tomatoes. The corn was an all-day process. We had to pick it in my aunt's field, drag it home, shuck it, scrape it, boil it and put it in freezer bags."

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? "Up until about eight, I played with my dolls. After that I really enjoyed my bicycle."

Education: Bachelor of arts degree in public administration from the University of Oklahoma. Master's degree in public administration with an emphasis in health administration from Troy State University.

Enlisted time: Four years active and four years Reserve. On active duty, she was an environmental health technician at Griffiss Air Force Base, N.Y. As a Reservist at Tinker Air Force Base, Okla., she was an information management specialist. She was commissioned through Air Force ROTC in 1997.

Why Air Force? "I knew I wasn't material for the others. I definitely wasn't a Marine. Flying jets was really cool. I had a good friend who really was trying to get me in the Air Force. Her dad was in the Air Force. Once I made up my mind I didn't even look at any of the others."

Previous assignment: Military personnel flight commander at Mountain Home Air Force Base, Idaho.

Favorite assignment: Holloman Air Force Base, N.M. "I had a good time. I was working with the 9th Fighter Squadron, which had the F-117A Stealth, as the squadron section commander. It was a cool mission and I had some great bosses."

How did your time at USMEPCOM headquarters help prepare you for commanding a MEPS? "I know who to reach out and touch. Because I have decent relationships with a lot of people up

there, I seem to be able to deal with the headquarters. I've been successful at it."

Future military plans: "I'm eligible for retirement in 2012, so barring anything unique, I would like to be an ROTC instructor."

What do you want to be when you grow up? "An event planner. I seem to have a knack for it. You meet all kinds of people. It's not boring. You do anything from weddings to birthday parties to bar mitzvahs, whatever you can get your hands on. I helped a lady do a bar mitzvah when I was in Chicago. That was really cool."

What do you do when you're not a commander? "I'm working on a mosaic on an outside garden table and chairs. I have the frames done, but the tops are taking forever. It will be a laurel wreath on the borders and different tile patterns. In the center I have three oak leaves. The chairs and table will be identical."

What's the best way to inspire the troops? "Lead by example. Be there for them."

What do you like best about your job? "I don't have a wing commander to the left, a squadron commander to the right and group commander down the hall. It's nice to be chief and be able to make a difference by working with other people to do what's best for the organization."

What do you order when you eat out? "I love Italian food. I really enjoy gnocci with pine nuts, pesto and olive oil."

What's the best present you ever got? "When I was about 13, I wanted a pair of Topsiders for a long time and got some for Christmas. I was thrilled to death."

What's your guilty pleasure? "Desserts in general, but chocolate anything."

What's guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? "Profanity. I don't like filthy TV and there's a lot of it these days. I also hate reality TV."

What would people be surprised to know about you? "I'm an art and music geek. I have various tastes in music. There's not much I don't care for. I don't care for opera or rap. I like classical. I like old country. My taste in art varies. The other day, I bought some frogs made out of bronze. I bought two of them to fit in my shadow box. I saw them when I was in Hawaii. They were more lifelike than most of the frog designs. The artist only makes a certain number and once they're gone they're gone."

Two things always on her desk: Paperwork and a cup of coffee.

Three things on her desk right now: "My planning calendar, my little troll that says, 'Please don't straighten up this mess, you'll screw up my whole world' and my coin box."

Last book she read: The last of the Harry Potter series.

What's your ideal vacation: "Somewhere with not too many people and a beach."



**St. Louis MEPS
Master Sgt.
Jamal Cheeks**

Hometown: Houston.
Fond childhood memories: "I remember my grandfather, we would go over to his house. He had about five acres. The interesting part of our weekends was when he would ride us on the tractor and help him cut the grass. When I got

older he let me drive it and cut the grass myself."

Education: He's pursuing an education degree with emphasis in early childhood development. "I'm in the Mentor St. Louis program. It's designed to help students who have a parent who's absent or doesn't have a lot of time to help the student with their studies. I think there's a need from a male perspective to be involved in early childhood development. I think we need to have more male role models as teachers. It's important to the development of our young children. You see a lot of women in early childhood development, and that's important, but not very many men."

Why the Marines? "The perception was that the Marine Corps was the hardest of all the services. After being in for 21 years, I can attest that we are the hardest. When I was in high school the goal was to go to the hardest service, graduate from boot camp and wear the beautiful dress blue uniform."

Previous assignment: Equal opportunity advisor for the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, Okinawa, Japan.

Favorite assignment: "Probably my first assignment at Tustin Marine Corps Air Station in California. It was my first introduction to the Marine Corps and the first time being on the West Coast. I thought it was so beautiful and still think that. It was so clean and the sun seemed to shine brighter on that side of our nation."

Future military career plans: "I just submitted an application for the Staff Noncommissioned Officer Degree Completion Program. Upon completion I will be assigned to the Marine Corps University at Quantico, Va., for a three-year pay back."

What do you want to be when you grow up? "I'd like to be a school teacher, either elementary or middle school. Elementary school, you've got to be able to teach all subjects."

In middle school I'd probably teach history."

What do you do when you're not a senior enlisted advisor? "I relax by spending time in the gym. Just some me time, kind of doing nothing. Doing some research online. Watching sports. Off time is just down time for me to clear my head. Spending time with my children is important to me, too."

What's the best way to inspire the troops? "Understanding their feedback, their input, is important. Not to minimize their feedback by not listening to them. Just because I'm a senior enlisted person doesn't mean I can't learn anything from that junior enlisted person. Having them understand that they're part of the team, their work is contributing to the mission and we need them. If that person feels good about being part of the team, I'm going to get a better product."

What do you like best about your job? "There are an awful lot of new things for me. I like that. I like not having a regular routine, doing different things. This is all brand new to me. I hadn't been exposed to recruiting. I didn't know anything about the MEPS except my experience 21 years ago."

What do you order when you eat out? "Depends on where we are. Usually something relatively simple like an etouffee dish or pasta. If I'm doing beef, it's sirloin or rib eye or porterhouse."

What's the best present you ever got? "I recently had a surprise 40th birthday party. That was a wonderful present."

What's your guilty pleasure? "Pralines and cream."

What's guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? "A show like Jerry Springer, something that's not positive or uplifting or addressing the issues we face as a nation. Things that belittle people and are disrespectful to people.

That's definitely turnoff to me."

What would people be surprised to know? "Some people would be surprised to know I'm black. A lot of people look at me and think I have a Hispanic background. Mom was Cajun, very light skinned. My features are not stereotypically African-American."

Three things always on his desk: A monster energy drink, a cell phone and a to do list.

One thing on his desk right now: Financial aid package for college.

What's your ideal vacation? "Somewhere in the Caribbean surrounded by many friends and family members, all expenses paid, with spirits galore with good food, good party music, just enjoying one another."



Syracuse MEPS
1st Sgt. Keat Cross

Hometown: "I was born in Kingston, Jamaica, but I grew up in Miami, Fla., from when I was 14."

Life as an immigrant: "My mom and my stepfather never explained it to me. I was just told to come. To this day, I don't know why they moved. I just came along for the move. It was a big adjustment. In Jamaica, we wore uniforms to school, here we wore civilian clothes. My accent was different. I got teased because people couldn't understand me. School

was easy, but adjusting to the language wasn't."

Fond childhood memories: "In Jamaica, going to the beaches, catching blue crabs, going to church every Sunday. It was very family-oriented. That was my favorite memory of Jamaica. When we came to America, we didn't do as much family stuff as we did back there."

What's in a name? "There are only three of us that I know of — my dad, my son and me. I always tell people we couldn't pronounce Keith in Jamaica, so we just said Keat and spelled it that way. I don't know where the name came from."

What was your favorite toy when you were a kid? "The bionic man (action figure). I used to run around the house making the sound effects."

Why the Army? "The Army was my second choice. I graduated from high school and wasn't doing anything so my mom asked what I was going to do with my life. We had a mother-son talk about it. I started with the Marines, but I had a friend who was a Marine and he hated it. When the Marine recruiter was coming to see me, I left and stayed away until he was gone. Then I called the Army recruiter."

Second time around: He was a processing NCO at Syracuse MEPS from 1994 to 1997 and was promoted to staff sergeant during his tour. "I was taking the elevator and ran into my recruiter. It's a small world. I enlisted in Miami, but he transferred up here. I think he was from this area."

Previous assignment: U.S. Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base Fla. "I worked for the chief of staff for a year. That was like three years in one because the hours were so long. Then I went back to logistics and worked for another general for two years. Then I was the first sergeant at the forward headquarters in Doha, Qatar."

Favorite assignment: "I was with the Inspector General Team for three years at Fort Wainwright, Alaska. I liked being able to go out and do inspections, serving soldiers, giving commanders and first sergeants leadership information and being able to pass along everything they needed to be successful."

What do you want to be when you grow up? "When you do so many jobs in the military, it's a matter of trying to find a job that matches. I have a bachelor of science in occupational education. I've sent out some resumes, but I'm looking mainly in the federal system in human resources and IG areas."

What do you do when you're not a senior enlisted advisor? "Nothing. I leave here, go home. Leave there come here. That's about it. I don't have any family here, so it's pretty boring. Once in a while I go to the casino, but that's months in between."

What's the best way to inspire the troops? "For me, it's letting them see that you're human. Let them know they can make mistakes and learn from them. I'm not one to be cussing and yelling if they do something wrong. I sit down and talk to them. That works for me. Sitting down, looking them in the eye and talking to them. I'd rather they speak up and let me know their ideas."

What do you like best about your job? "That I came back here to be the first sergeant, seeing the same people who were here when I was here 10 years ago. It also amazes me to see how many people come here daily to join the military, even with the war going on."

What do you order when you eat out? "I love Red Lobster, so I would say lobster and crab legs. It would be great if I could get that every day. A steak here and there, but I love seafood."

What's the best present you ever got? "I bought myself a little Mercedes C230 because I just wanted a new car. That's the one I wanted, that's the one I gave myself."

What's your guilty pleasure? Fried gizzards. "In Jamaica, we eat just about all parts of the chicken and I really like gizzards. Here I fry some up at least once a week."

What's guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? "Soap operas. I can't stand watching those things."

What would people be surprised to know about you? "I write poetry."

One thing always on his desk: A bottle of water.

Three things on his desk right now: "Command coins from my military career, a bottle of Pepsi and my first sergeant notebook."

What's the last book you read? "I don't read many books. I read a lot of magazines and my favorite newspaper, USA Today."

What's your ideal vacation? "Taking a cruise. I've been on three cruises so far and that's one of the best things I can do."



Portland, Maine
MEPS
Senior Master Sgt.
Terry Spoon

Hometown: Rutledge, Tenn. "It's nothing like it was

when I was young. It's very rural. Rutledge is the main city in Granger county. It is now the leading tomato growing county in the country. They grow the finest tomatoes in the country. They ship them all over the world."

Life on the farm: "I picked tobacco, tomatoes, potatoes, green peppers, you name it. We had dairy cattle. We raised hay. It was wonderful. Every day was different. You never knew what you were going to find. You work like a dog, don't get me wrong. For the first four years of my life, we lived in a two-room log cabin before we moved into a brick house. My elementary school had second, third and fourth grade in one room. We had a smokehouse for curing meat."

Walk with the animals: "Animals will do really dumb things. One time a cow had her calf on the ice. If you're not there in 10 minutes, the calf is going to freeze to death. Another time a cow had her calf right on the edge of a ravine. The calf slid down about 25 feet. The mother's standing there bellowing her head off. You've got to find a way to get down there and get it out."

What was your favorite toy as a kid? "A book. I used to play a lot of board games, but by myself. I played all four sides. My siblings were all 8 years older than me and my sister was four years younger, so she wasn't interested. Living out in the country, you can't go over to the neighbors."

Memories of Dad: "My dad worked like a dog all his life. He died at 52. On his death bed he made me promise that I'd finish high school, that I'd never become a farmer and that I'd stay in church."

Why Air Force? "My father-in-law was a Korean war Marine and sat down with me one day and said, 'It's time to make a choice about what

you're going to do with your life, and the way you go about things, this is the right choice for you.' He was absolutely right."

Previous assignment: First sergeant at the Minneapolis MEPS. "At the first sergeant course I went to after I got to Minnesota I met the first sergeant at Portland. We got to our assignments the exact same month. When my tour in Minnesota was over, the Air Force was offering Barksdale, (Air Force Base, La.), Las Vegas and Arizona. My wife said no way, she wanted to be near the water. So I started looking for special duty assignments. That's how I wound up here."

Favorite assignment: Misawa, Japan. "The best part was hanging out with friends. It certainly wasn't the weather. We got 150 inches of snow a year."

Future military plans: "There are none. I'm retiring after this assignment. I'm done. By the time I finish this assignment I'll have 26 years in. It's time to go do something else. Probably settle around Knoxville, Tenn. My ultimate would be to go to Australia, but I don't think that's logical."

What do you want to be when you grow up? "My father-in-law asked me that before he died. I told him I didn't know. I still don't. I just want to be healthy and happy."

What do you do when you're not a senior enlisted advisor? "Maine is a beautiful state, the people are nice, but my one goal right now is to get ready for retirement. I watch sports, read, low cost things."

What's the best way to inspire the troops? "I'm a big believer in 'say what you mean and mean what you say.' Then do what you say. Sometimes they don't really like it, and I don't really care. If you're consistent and they know where you're coming from they'll respond."

What do you like best about your job? "All the things I'm learning. Learning how to deal with different personalities and other agencies. I consider the headquarters an outside agency. Interacting with the Red Cross in case something happens to one of our people. Things like that. It's a never ending learning process."

What do you order when you eat out? "Asian. I like stir fry in particular."

What's the best present you ever got? "I was raised Southern Baptist. You show up in church and you're always getting a tongue lashing. My father-in-law was a Pentecostal minister. The best thing was learning you could have fun instead of getting the snot beat out of you every time you walked through the door."

What's your guilty pleasure? "Dark chocolate. I have a refrigerator in my office and I always have it stocked with dark chocolate."

What's guaranteed to make you turn off the TV? "Dramas. If I want drama I go to work. You want to see pain, you want to see heartache there's plenty of it at work. I don't see drama as entertainment."

One thing always on his desk: "Something to do with training. It's a never ending cycle."

Three things on his desk right now: Suspense binder, counseling schedule and the MEPS financial plan.

Finish one book, start another: He just finished "Wizard at Large" by Terry Brooks, one of a five-book series. "I'm about to start reading 'Tarzan of the Apes.' I've read a lot of Edgar Rice Burroughs, but I've never read that."

What's your ideal vacation? "No (information technology), no phone, no desert. Lush, green, warm and remote."

Petty officer balances work, home, study to pursue medical degree

By Christopher Blickley
Harrisburg MEPS Test Control Officer

If you have visited the Harrisburg MEPS in the evening in the last three years, Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Ward probably greeted you from behind the control desk.

As a member of the testing section, he has been balancing work, school and family life with the ultimate goal of being accepted to medical school.

He decided to join the Navy when he was 19, after working jobs in plumbing, restaurants and construction.

“My grandfather served during World War II and always spoke very highly about that period in his life, so I decided I would give it a try,” Ward said.

After initial training he was assigned to the aircraft carrier USS John F. Kennedy where he was able to complete his first college course. When he arrived at the Harrisburg MEPS he was assigned as the night testing NCOIC, which left mornings free to pursue college.



Petty Officer 1st Class Daniel Ward

“The command was very supportive about attending college,” Ward said, “and I ran with it. I took at least 15 credit hours each semester and began shadowing doctors between semesters. My wife, Latisha, was also very understanding, especially after our son, Ryan, was born shortly after I had begun classes. There were many days I

would be out of the house by 6:30 in the morning and not home until 9:30 at night, just to begin the hours of homework I had each night.”

His goal finally became a reality on May 30, when he was offered a position in the Penn State College of Medicine class entering in 2008.

“It is going to be a difficult curriculum, but I think I will be up to the challenge. With the support of family and friends, the next four years of school will be exciting.”

Ward is in the process of applying to the Health Professions Scholarship Program to help pay for his medical education and began classes on Aug. 1. After attending Penn State he plans to pursue a residency in family medicine or emergency medicine in the Navy.

MEPS of Excellence

Military Entrance Processing Stations must meet or exceed the criteria in 11 areas representing the core processes of medical, testing, processing and general military readiness in order to be named MEPS of Excellence.

The 11 criteria are:

- Timeliness of military evaluations and awards
- Recruiter leads ratio
- Medical same day processing rate
- Drug and HIV specimen processing
- Clinical Laboratory Improvement Program
- Physical fitness results

- Height/weight standard
- Electronic Fingerprint Capture Station (unclassifiable fingerprints)
- Incidents of serious misconduct by military or civilian employees
- MOE test loss compromise
- Bank of America travel card delinquency rates

Third Quarter, Fiscal 2008 MEPS of Excellence

Western Sector — Amarillo MEPS Eastern Sector — Portland, Maine MEPS



Raleigh senior enlisted advisor runs for good reason

“Put on your running shoes,” says 1st Sgt. William Vintson, the Raleigh MEPS senior enlisted advisor who’s dedicated to inspiring and promoting running and physical fitness at his MEPS and in his community. Vintson runs not only to prepare for the Army physical fitness test, but also for competition and to give the gift of financial support to others. “Running takes dedication and discipline” he said, “and I’m always up for the challenge.”

Vintson won first place in his age group for the Cary Road Race (proceeds go to enhance existing greenways and trails in Cary, N.C.), third place in his age group for the Multiple Sclerosis 10K Race, and 1st place in his age group for the Airborne and Special Forces Museum 5K Race. Vintson’s non-competitive races include, Run for the Oaks (proceeds go toward planting trees in Raleigh), and the Race of Grace (to help bring attention to health care, homelessness and hunger).

— submitted by Kimberley Franks

ATLANTA MEPS**Beverly Hayes**

Human Resources Assistant

Years of service: 23

Last assignment: Navy Reserve

Personnel Center, New Orleans

Diversions: Helping others and shopping.

First impression: "A well organized operation with co-workers who are friendly and helpful. My supervisor has a great team-player attitude."

Crandell Lewis

Information Technology

Systems Administrator

Years of service: 15

Last assignment: Navy Recruiting District, Atlanta

Diversions: Computers.

First impression: "Great place to work with a family-oriented staff."

Eddie Marsh

Human Resources Assistant

Year of service: 1

Education: Freshman at Clayton State

University for information technology

Last assignment: Little Rock MEPS

Diversions: Harley rider, swimming and church usher.

First impression: "Good group of people to work with and understanding supervision that is always willing to help out."

Belinda McCallum

Human Resources Assistant

Years of service: 5

Education: Two years of college and

medical assistant certification

Last assignment: Dental assistant

in Germany

Diversions: Bowling, reading, miniature golf, traveling and shopping.

First impression: "Much more fast-paced environment than what I am accustomed to, but I will be able to easily adjust."

Steven Thomas

Assistant Budget Technician

Years of service: 4

Education: Bachelor of science degree in computer science

Last assignment: 1st Infantry Division, Germany

Diversions: Computers and sports.

First impression: "Looks like a great place to work."

1st Lt. Brandon Yockel

Test Control Officer

Years of service: 5

Education: Bachelor of arts degree in

political science, pursuing a master of science degree in urban regional planning

Last assignment: Executive officer, Headquarters Troop, Hawaii Army National Guard

Diversions: Drawing, playing football and coaching football or little league baseball.

First impression: "Friendly atmosphere, seems well-organized and efficient."

Sgt. Ronald McCrary

Travel Office Assistant

Years of service: 21

Education: 2 years of college

Last assignment: National Guard Quartermaster Chemical Repairman

Diversions: Fishing, outdoors and ministering to others.

First impression: "Fast paced and challenging environment."

Sgt. Carmese Tate

Testing Assistant

Years of service: 15

Civilian education: Junior in college

Last assignment: National Guard and Reserve Liaison Office, Fort Gordon, Ga.

Diversions: Boxing trainer, real estate and Bible history.

First impression: "Well-run organization."

Spc. Simone McFarlane

Medical Technician

Years of service: 5

Last assignment: 4th Adjutant General

Detachment, New York National Guard

Diversions: Writing and reading.

First impression: "I get a great vibe about my new job and can't wait to be an asset to the medical section."

Cpl. Andres Rico

Test Administrator

Years of service: 3 ½

Last assignment: Marine Aircraft Group 36, Okinawa, Japan

Diversions: Soccer, volleyball, lacrosse and video games.

First impression: "Friendly atmosphere; seems well-organized and efficient."

FORT LEE MEPS**Capt. Alyssa Astphan**

Assistant Operations Officer

Years of service: 6

Last assignment: State Maintenance

Plans Officer, Fort Pickett, Va.

Education: Bachelor of arts degree in political science, Norwich University

Diversions: Rugby, hiking and camping.

First impression: "Fast-paced and very organized."

Tianna Felix

Secretary

Years of service: 9 ½ (4 military)

Last assignment: Denver MEPS

Diversions: New England Patriots.

HOUSTON MEPS**Capt. Henry Trudell**

Assistant Operations Officer

First impression: "I felt very welcomed."

Dr. James Barnes

Chief Medical Officer

First impression: "Everyone was nice."

Dewayne Harrison

Human Resources Assistant

First impression: "I felt I was part of a true team."

Sonya Redmond

Human Resources Assistant

First impression: "A very close-knit organization."

Benjamin Leviston

Human Resources Assistant

First impression: "Very friendly people. Made me feel welcome."

OMAHA MEPS**Stephen Lazoritz**

Chief Medical Officer

Years of service: 10 ½

Last assignment: Walter Reed Army Medical Center

Diversions: Children and grandchildren

First impression: "This is a great place."

Robert Renfro

Medical Technician

Years of service: 8

Last assignment: U.S. Naval Aviation Schools Command Swim Site, San Diego

Diversions: Family, Husker football, church, sports, movies, academies.

First impression: "Great command climate; friendly, personable staff; enriching, positive work place."

PHOENIX MEPS**April Wise**

Human Resources Assistant

Years of service: 13 (Navy)

Last assignment: University of Phoenix military enrollment advisor

Diversions: Attending school online, spending time with her 6-year-old

daughter, and hanging out with her family on the lake and fishing, cooking and

woodworking.

First impression: "I am glad to be back in the military environment."

Celeste Toglana

Human Resources Assistant

Years of service: 16 (Marine Corps)

Last assignment: Banner Good Samaritan Medical Center

Diversions: Taking her kids to the

playground and staying at home relaxing.

First impression: "All departments were very welcoming and open. Everyone expressed their positive attitudes and offered their help at any time."

Capt. Mayra Diaz

Operations Officer
Years of service: 9
Last assignment: Fort Hood, Texas
Diversions: Watching movies, skydiving, riding motorcycles.
First impression: "Happy to be in a different environment with a very friendly group of professionals."

PORTLAND, MAINE MEPS**Stephen Bowman**

Test Coordinator
Last assignment: Retired from Brunswick Naval Air Station

John Bruno

Test Clerk
Years of service: 20+ (retired Navy)
First impression: Likes working for the military and wanted to get a federal job.

Jean LaMontagne

Travel Assistant
Years of service: 26 (retired Army master sergeant)
Diversions: Loves the ocean.

**PORTLAND, ORE., MEPS****Major Kevin Kerby**

Commander
Years of service: 13
Last assignment: Fort Leavenworth, Kan.

Sgt. 1st Class Ronald Mitcham

Medical NCOIC
Years of Service: 20
Last assignment: Fort Bliss, Texas

RALEIGH MEPS**Kiila Patterson-Myers**

Human Resources Assistant
Years of Service: 7 ½ (Air Force)
Education: Bachelor's degree in business management from Howard University
Last assignment: Andrews Air Force Base
Diversions: Writing poetry, walking around the lake and feeding ducks.
First impression: "Warm family feeling."

Jasmine Hunt

Human Resources Assistant
Years of Service: 9 ½ (Air Force)
Last Assignment: Air Force ROTC, Daytona Beach, Fla.
Education: Pursuing bachelor's degree
Diversions: Playing with my kids
First impression: "Everybody was very friendly."

**HEADQUARTERS**

Steven Weller and his wife, **Rebecca**, a son, **Marcus Joseph**, June 1; 7 pounds, 3 ounces; 19 inches.

HOUSTON MEPS

Lt. Miguel Macias and his wife, **Melissa**, a daughter, **Maya Sofia**, May 7; 8 pounds, 3 ounces.

RALEIGH MEPS

Ada Deloach and her husband, twin boys, **Ethan Justin** and **Xavier Cameron**, March 24, 6 & 6 ½ pounds.

SALT LAKE CITY MEPS

Chief Warrant Officer Timothy Edwards and his wife, **Shirene**, a daughter, **Brylee**, April 26; 6 pounds, 6 ounces, 20 inches.

PORTLAND, ORE., MEPS

Carwin "Guy" Fine and his wife, **Deborah**, a daughter, **Sarah Elizabeth**, May 20; 7 pounds, 5 ounces, 19 inches.

FOND FAREWELLS**HOUSTON MEPS**

Charles Cuevas
Paul Davis

Sgt. 1st Class Zandra Parker

Departing for: Fort Benning, Ga.

Staff Sgt. Jamice Thompson

Departing for: Deployment

Petty Officer 2nd Class

Tito Roman-Ortiz
Departing for: Civilian life

PHOENIX MEPS**Paul Sexton**

Supervisory Human Resources Assistant
Departing for: Retirement after more than 40 years of service.
Future plans: Moving to Virginia to be closer to family.

OMAHA MEPS**Capt. Julio Medina**

Operations Officer
Years of service: 6
Departing for: Fort Lewis, Wash.
Most remembered for: Skill with people and technical expertise, his yellow Volvo and being the MEPS' MVP bowler.

PORTLAND, ORE., MEPS**Maj. Kurt Steinagel**

Commander
Master Sgt. Carl Roesch
Medical NCOIC

SALT LAKE CITY MEPS**Capt. Trevor Higby**

Operations Officer

CONGRATS**FORT DIX MEPS**

Teresa Kirkland (spouse of medical NCOIC **Sgt. 1st Class Wendell Kirkland**), Co-volunteer of the Year for the Fort Dix installation.

RALEIGH MEPS

Ada Deloach, bachelor of science degree in business management, 3.5 grade point average.

SALT LAKE CITY MEPS

Kelly Boyer, bachelor's degree in sociology, with a minor in criminal justice.

APPLAUSE**HOUSTON MEPS**

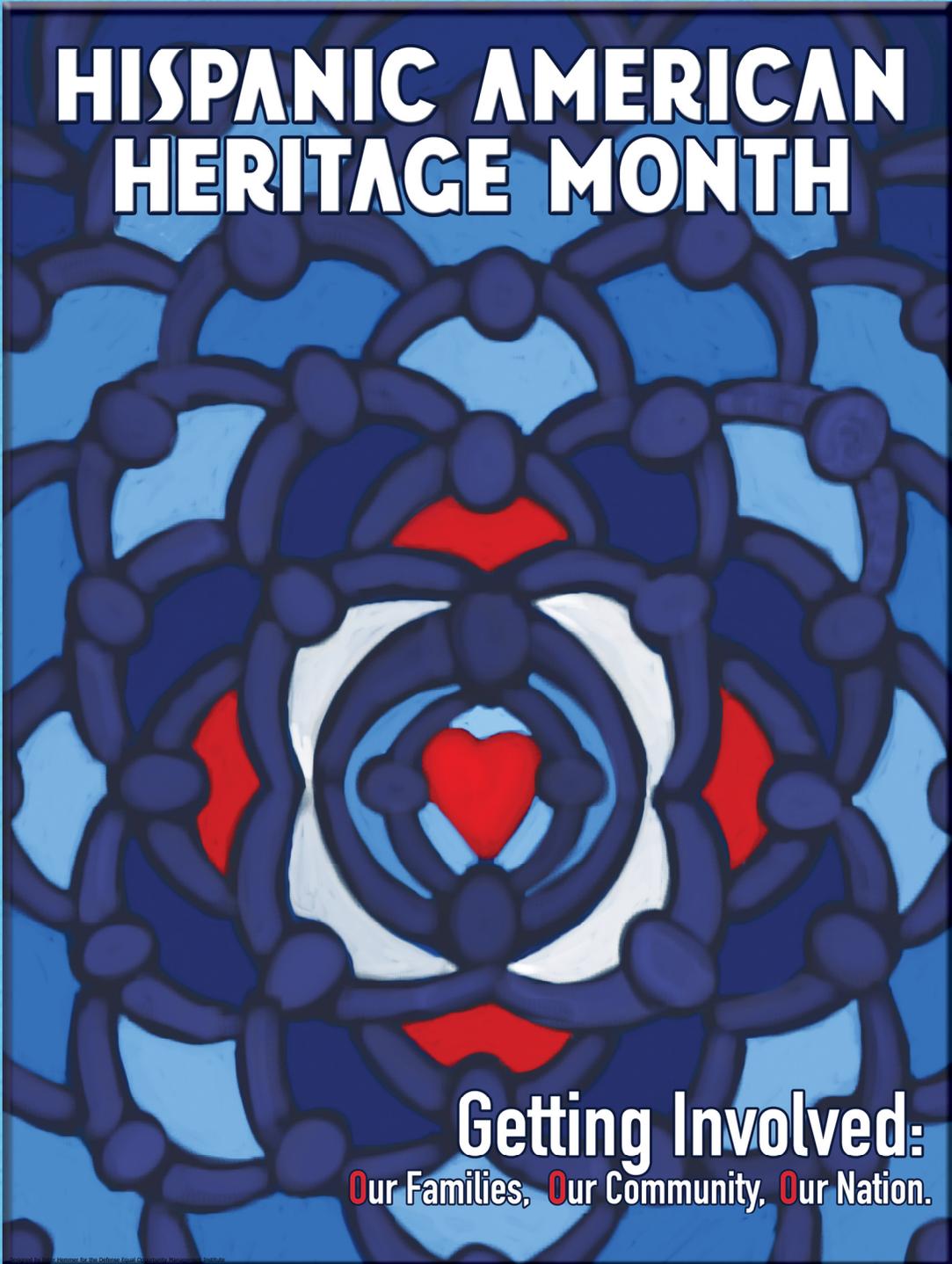
Petty Officer 2nd Class Tito Roman-Ortiz, Military Member of the Quarter; **Marlon Butler**, Civilian of the Quarter; **Staff Sgt. Jamice Thompson**, Impact Joint Service Achievement Medal and Military Member of the Quarter; **David Johnston**, Civilian of the Quarter; **Charlotte Burkley**, **Beverly Harris** and

Joseph Thomas III, 25 years government service; **June Delaney**, **Evangeline Gilbert** and **Eric Shumaker**, 20 years government service; **Cathy Carter**, 15 years government service; **LaQuitha Fuller**, **David Johnston** and **Bridget Lindsey**, 10 years government service; and **Timothy Kester**, 5 years government service.

PHOENIX MEPS

Dean Puttonen, promoted to supervisory human resources assistant; **Steve Cochran**, promoted to lead human resources assistant; Civilian of the Quarter; **Shahn Savoy**, Civilian of the Quarter.

HISPANIC AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH



Getting Involved:

Our Families, Our Community, Our Nation.

September 15 - October 15, 2008