

News Briefs

Town Hall meetings

U.S. Army Garrison Commander Col. Wendy Martinson will hold three town hall meetings between Wednesday and June 3 to discuss Base Realignment and Closure and other transformation projects, issues with proposed construction "bubbles," and timelines. The town hall meetings will be held at the Army Community Service, Building 2797 on Stanley Road.

The meetings will take place:

- Wednesday from 1 to 2 p.m. for U.S. Army Garrison and tenant personnel whose last name begins with A through M.
- Wednesday from 6 to 7 p.m. for housing residents.
- June 3 from 3 to 4 p.m. for U.S. Army Garrison and tenant personnel whose last name begins with N through Z.

For special needs or accommodations, call Jackie Schlatter at 221-1765 or e-mail jackie.schlatter@us.army.mil.

Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Expo

U.S. Army South will sponsor an Asian Pacific American Heritage Month Expo Saturday from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the commissary parking lot. For more information, call Sgt. 1st Class Megan Grant at 295-6800. To request reasonable accommodations for a disability, call 221-0218.

Military Spouse Appreciation Day

The 2008 Military Spouse Appreciation Day will be celebrated with an open house Tuesday from 2 to 4 p.m. at Army Community Service, Building 2797, in the auditorium. This event is to honor the husbands and wives of servicemembers for the significant sacrifices they make for freedom's cause and to show them that they are an integral part of the success of the armed forces. The event includes goodie baskets and a slideshow featuring ACS programs. Refreshments will be served. For more information, call 221-2705.

Asthma, Allergy Awareness Day

Celebrate Asthma and Allergy Awareness Day Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the Brooke Army Medical Center medical mall. Free screening pulmonary function tests will be available. Asthma and allergy educators will be on site to answer questions and to provide tips for improving asthma and allergy control. The event is sponsored by the pulmonary disease medicine, pediatrics and allergy clinics.

Sports eye protection campaign

To help address the need for sports eye pro-

See NEWS BRIEFS P4



Courtesy graphic

Harney Road closure

Harney Road will close between Forage Avenue and Garden Avenue starting June 19 to accommodate construction of the Medical Education and Training Campus Dining Facility. The METC is one of the primary projects of the San Antonio Base Realignment and Closure program. Along with the dining facility, the medical campus will include new dormitories and five new instructional facilities.

Taking care of Families

Children of deployed, injured troops share experiences at Camp C.O.P.E.

By Elaine Wilson
Fort Sam Houston Public Information Office

A handful of teens sit around in a circle threading beads to make bracelets as Big Kenny Alphin, from country duo Big & Rich, breaks out in song. He sings with passion as he threads a bracelet, hoping to spread a message of encouragement to the teens.

The 16 and 17-year-olds are all children of wounded or deployed servicemembers. They gave up a sunny Saturday to spend the day at school and share their experiences, and pain, at Camp C.O.P.E.

One of the teens, senior Kaleigh Oswald from Robert G. Cole High School here, has a father deployed to Afghanistan and a brother to Iraq. Her school counselor, Julie Coffey, encouraged her to come to the camp to talk about her experiences.

"It helps to talk to others," Oswald said. "We're all bonding really well; we can relate to each other."

Camp C.O.P.E., which stands for Courage, Optimism, Patience and Encouragement, is a day of activities and support groups designed to help youth better cope with the effects of war, deployments, and the sacrifices they are asked to make on a daily basis. More than 70 children and teens from Fort Sam Houston and the local area participated in the camp, which was held at the Robert G. Cole Middle School here.

Big pauses from his singing, and

beading, to talk to the kids with the same passion he brought to his music. "Whenever you see someone you love hurting, breathe in," he said, raising his arms overhead, "then breathe out. Let it all out. Cast as much good and positiveness you can into the situation."

"No one can imagine the stuff you've gone through, but you're an inspiration," he said.

The camp's founders, Elizabeth Reep and Sarah Balint, from Dallas, listen to Big nearby. They too feel children of servicemembers are inspiring.

The founders started the camp in 2006 to reach out to children of wounded servicemembers. Reep had first-hand experience since her husband was wounded in Iraq in 2003. After her stepsons started acting out, Reep realized that other children were probably suffering too.

"Our boys reacted just like most children of deployed or injured Soldiers do," she said. "I realized that there were probably hundreds of thousands of children going through the same ordeal and needed help coping with these emotions and fears."

Wanting to help, Reep partnered with Balint, and they set up their first camps at the Road to Recovery Conference and Tribute in Orlando in 2006 and 2007 to care for children of injured servicemembers while their parents attended the conference.

With an overwhelmingly positive response, they decided to expand the curriculum to include children of



Photo by Olivia Mendoza

Zackery Rey writes inside a fragment from a broken flower pot Saturday during a Camp C.O.P.E. activity at the Robert G. Cole Middle School. The flower pot pieces represented a broken Family. Camp counselors asked the children to write a sad word on the inside and a happy word on the outside, then glued the pot together to show the resiliency of military Families.

deployed troops, and to take their camp on the road.

Around that time, they received a letter from Melanie Morgan, a Fort Sam Houston Elementary School teacher whose husband had been wounded in combat. Morgan connect-

See CAMP C.O.P.E. P11

CAMP C.O.P.E. from P3

ed the founders with the Fort Sam Houston Military Child Education Coalition, comprising installation and Fort Sam Houston Independent School District leaders.

They worked together to bring the camp to Fort Sam Houston, which was a perfect fit with a large population of wounded and deployed warriors in the area.

"Fort Sam Houston has been more than accommodating," Balint said. "We're very

pleased with the support and the interest."

Counselors, administrators, custodial staff and food service workers from FSHISD and outlying areas donated their time to help Camp C.O.P.E. Two of those volunteers, school counselor Linda Reed and Jessica Crafton, assistant principal at the Fort Sam Houston Elementary School, were working in a nearby building with the 7 and 8-year-olds.

For their learning activity, Reed covered a flower pot with a towel and then smashed it

with a hammer. The pot represented a Family broken apart by war or injuries. The children were given a fragment and asked to write a sad word on the inside and a happy word on the outside.

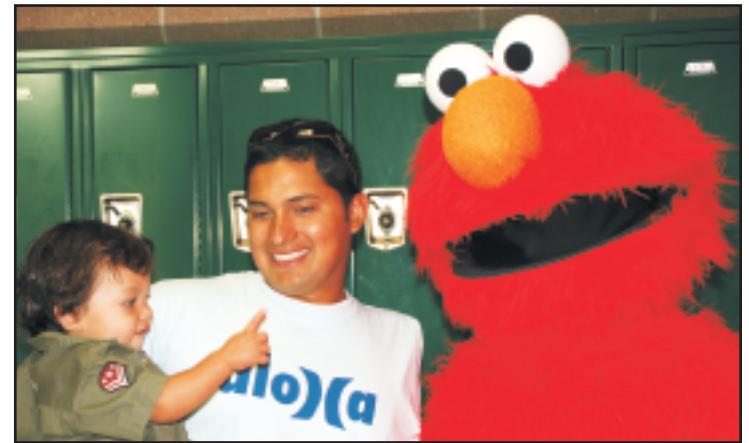
"My word is sad," said 8-year-old Candace Reyes. Another girl chose the word anger.

The counselors then glued the pot back together to represent the resiliency and strength of military Families.

Dr. Gail Siller, FSHISD superintendent, said she sees that strength exhibited on a daily basis. "We feel very strongly that our kids are resilient, but we want to do everything we can to support their efforts."

A day packed with activities and group talk ended with a visit from a childhood favorite and Sesame Street star – Elmo. The younger children and the young at heart gathered around the red monster, who helped end a day of learning and emotion with laughter.

J.R. Martinez, a wounded warrior and a spokesman for the Coalition to Salute America's Heroes, also drew a crowd. The personable 24-



Photos by Olivia Mendoza

Sp. Daniel Acosta and son, Mario, visit with Sesame Street superstar Elmo after Camp C.O.P.E. wrapped up Saturday. The Camp offered children of deployed and injured warriors a day of group sessions and hands-on activities that were designed to teach coping skills and to show the children that they are not alone.

year-old with a ready smile spent the day with a teen group sharing his experiences. In April 2003, Martinez suffered severe burns to more than 40 percent of his body when the Humvee he was driving hit a landmine in Iraq. He underwent 32 surgeries and spent nearly three years recovering at Brooke Army Medical Center.

"I can relate to what they're going through and pass on the lessons that I've learned," said Martinez of his

day with the teens. "The camp is great. Taking small steps like this one to take care of military Families will help us get to the huge leaps later."

Balint said she simply hopes the participants walk away "knowing that they are not alone."

"It's good to know there are other people nearby I can talk to," said Oswald, who plans to keep in touch with some of her new friends from the camp. "It's better to talk than to bottle it up inside."



Big Kenny Alphin, from the country duo Big & Rich, shares his experiences with teens during Camp C.O.P.E. "I remember years ago thinking, if I could get that record deal, all my worries will be over, but it's a whole new batch," he said. "It all comes down to how you deal with it on a daily basis."