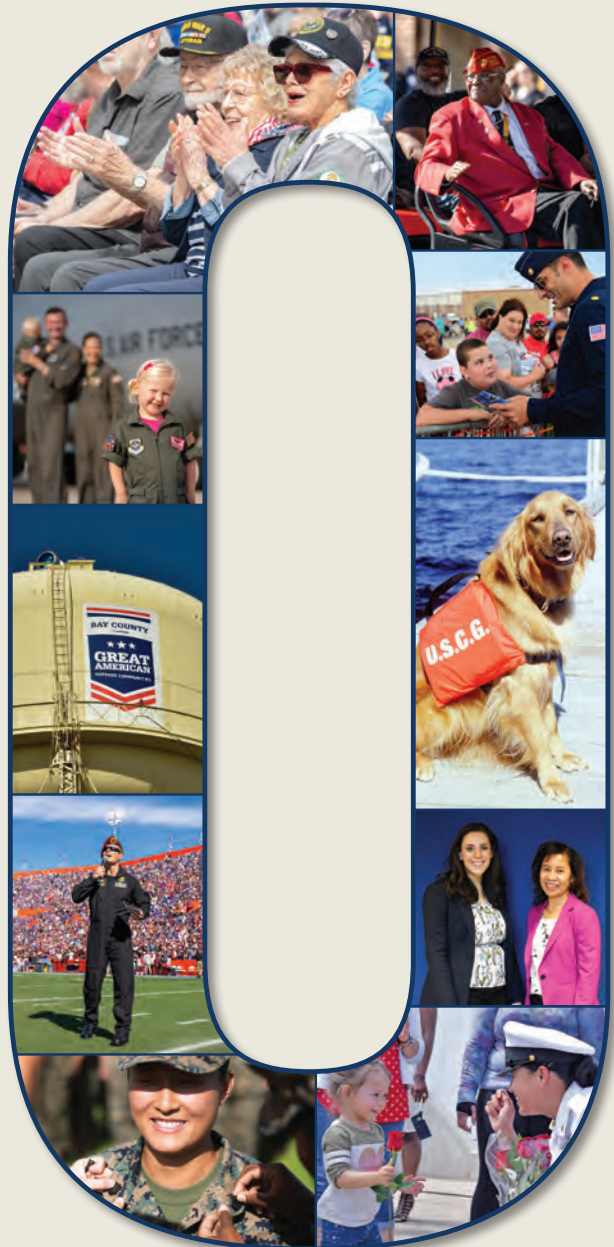


AMERICA'S DEFENSE COMMUNITIES



**CELEBRATING 50 GREAT AMERICAN
DEFENSE COMMUNITIES**

OCTOBER 2024



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BY TIM FORD, CEO, ADC

GADC AT 50: CELEBRATING EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE AND PLACES

This year, ADC is proud to celebrate reaching the milestone of having recognized 50 communities as part of the Great American Defense Community program.

From the desert heat of **El Paso** to the frozen air of **Fairbanks**, from the gulf waters of **Pensacola** to the Southern charm of **Beaufort**, these communities go above and beyond every day in their exceptional support of our military missions and families. Whether in sunny **San Diego** by the sea or the heartland of Omaha, each place creates welcoming spaces where service members and their families can thrive.

Eight years ago, ADC, in collaboration with USAA, launched this unique recognition program to celebrate the vital role communities play in supporting the military. We've traveled the country and visited nearly all 50 of these exceptional places. Occasionally we've found ourselves in unexpected situations—like an NFL game in **Tampa**, a 2,000-person photoshoot in **Kentucky** and an MRE-inspired Top Chef competition in Arizona. Along the way, we've written hundreds of stories and created nearly 50 videos to showcase their impact and inspire others.

This incredible journey is just beginning. As we look ahead to meeting the next 50 Great American Defense Communities, we invite you to enjoy this special issue, celebrating GADC's first 50. 



ADC Past President Mike Cooper celebrates with a Great American Defense Community in 2017. ADC archive photo

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Ravi Chaudhary, assistant secretary of the Air Force for energy, installations, and environment, fist bumps an airman during a visit to Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota. Air Force photo by 1st Class Josephine Pepin

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ADC board member Sal Nodjoman poses with the community in Pensacola, Florida to celebrate the region's Great American Defense Communities recognition in 2021. Photo courtesy of the Pensacola Chamber of Commerce

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Members gather for a standing room only meeting at a National Association of Installation Developers event early in the group's history. ADC archival photo

ON THE COVER



CELEBRATING 50 GREAT AMERICAN DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

A New Generation—Army Reserve photo by Capt. Katherine Bustos Chaves

Eternal Hero—Army photo by Spc. Vincent Levelev

Ceremony Cheer—Oregon Military Department of Public Affairs photo by John Hughel

Vets at Fort Sumter—Army photo by Sgt. Leo Jenkins

Cannon Air Force Base—Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Chip Pons

Elizabeth City Mascot—Photo courtesy of Coast Guard District 5

Sharene Brown—ADC photo by Will Noonan

Homecoming Rose—Navy photo by Lt. j.g. Jasmine Spencer

Promotion Ceremony—Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Eric Huynh

Staff Sgt. Matt Garner Speaks at Football Game—Army photo by Sgt. Brian Collett

Water Tower—Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Alexandre Montes

MacDill Family—Air Force photo by Senior Airman Lauren Cobin

Navajo—Marine Corps Photo by Lance Cpl. Erica Stanke

Thank You Veterans—Army photo by Sgt. Michael Schwenk

Celebration—Navy photo by James Kimber

Departing San Diego—Photo courtesy of the Navy

Ellsworth Air and Space Show—Air Force photo by Senior Airman Quentin Marx

Seafair—Army photo by Staff Sgt. David Meyer

ABOUT ADC

ADC builds resilient communities that support America's military. We are the connection point for leaders from communities, states, the military and industry on community-military issues by enhancing knowledge, information sharing, and best practices. With nearly 300 communities, states, regions, and affiliated industry organizations, ADC represents every major defense community/state in the nation.

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SNAPSHOT

America's Defense Communities looks back at some of the moments that caught our eyes in 2024.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Cadets celebrate with a chest bump after receiving their diplomas during the Air Force Academy Class of 2024 graduation ceremony. Air Force photo by Trevor Cokley

ADC and USAA visit Elizabeth City, North Carolina in August 2024 to celebrate the community's recognition as a Great American Defense Community. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth City

Members of ADC's Military Spouse Leadership Initiative pose at the U.S. Capitol during the Defense Communities National Summit. ADC photo by Kelsey Judd

Sailors assigned to USS Boxer and Marines assigned to the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit play a game of basketball during a Fourth of July celebration. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class James Finney

Senior Airman Ariel Hastings holds a sign of encouragement during a National Suicide Prevention Month event at Hanscom Air Force Base. Air Force photo by Mark Herlihy

A family member hugs a trainee at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in August 2024. Air Force photo by Vanessa R. Adame

Rep. Greg Murphy (R-N.C.) presents Liz Hartman with the Defense Community Champion award at ADC's National Summit in April 2024. ADC photo by Will Noonan







Lt. Col. Mike Vilvin, 91st Air Refueling Squadron commander, poses with his son at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida in April during Month of the Military Child. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Lauren Cobin



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OVERHEARD

IN OUR DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

America's Defense Communities looks back at quotes that perked our ears in 2024.

Defense communities can play a pivotal role in supporting post-9/11 and post-Afghanistan veterans by fostering an environment that values their unique skills and dedication to service.

—LIZ HARTMAN, COMMANDER, DISTRICT 6 FOR THE AMERICAN LEGION DEPARTMENT OF NORTH CAROLINA AND A 2024 DEFENSE COMMUNITY CHAMPION

If we are committed to supporting a more secure world, we must commit to making it a world worth securing.

—RAVI CHAUDHARY,
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF
THE AIR FORCE FOR ENERGY,
INSTALLATIONS AND ENVIRONMENT

Your character, judgment, integrity and courage will let you play a central role in the next chapter of American history, so we are counting on you.

—DEFENSE SECRETARY LLOYD AUSTIN,
DURING A NAVAL ACADEMY
COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

I started working at DOD over 30 years ago, and I've heard plenty of salty language, but to this day, the most profane and damaging seven words I hear in the Pentagon are: 'This is how we've always done it.' That's simply unacceptable today.

—KATHLEEN HICKS,
DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

It's not just about becoming an officer; it's about becoming a leader.

—CHRISTIAN BRADLEY,
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF
MILITARY SCIENCE,
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS—
FORT SMITH

I think what makes a great defense community leader is the same thing that makes a great leader anywhere, and that's humility, having a servant's heart and helping others first.

—JIM IACOCCA, PRESIDENT AND CEO,
KNOX REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE

Commanders should be out in the communities talking about how to solve problems across the fence line almost daily.

—REAR ADMIRAL JOHN MENONI,
ACTING COMMANDER OF
NAVY INSTALLATIONS COMMAND

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THE FUTURE OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT AGREEMENTS

To celebrate Installation Innovation Forum's return to San Antonio, ADC spoke to Lt. Gen. Omar J. Jones IV, commanding general of Army Installation Management Command (IMCOM), about the significance of intergovernmental support agreements (IGSAs) and their role in enhancing community partnerships, operational efficiency and cost savings at installations.

ADC: You have prioritized intergovernmental support agreements within IMCOM and at other installations. What drove that decision?

LT. GEN. JONES: U.S. Army Installation Management Command provides programs and services that enable the highest quality of life for our soldiers, civilians and families, while supporting the readiness of Army formations on 104 installations around the world.

We are America's Army, and our bond with the American people is foundational to everything we do. Soldiers, families and Army civilians are also members of the local communities near our installations where they live, work, shop and play alongside their neighbors. A strong relationship between on-post communities and the local communities is essential for our Army to meet the needs of our nation.

IGSAs enable us to formally enter public-private partnerships with state or local government entities within the U.S. and its territories for installation support services.

IGSAs help us strengthen community relationships and achieve operational efficiencies and cost savings.

Currently, IMCOM has 172 IGSAs, meaning that 75% of all IGSAs across DOD belong to IMCOM. Since 2015, we have saved approximately \$170 million through these agreements.

Based on these initial successes, I directed all garrison commanders to review their contract portfolios for consideration of IGSA partnerships. We formed an IGSA strategic engagement team to train garrison staff, coordinate partnership summits with interested community partners, develop IGSA documentation for execution, and communicate lessons learned and best practices to both the installation and partners.

Notably, we have 35 IGSAs with universities, including four regional IGSAs that are available to garrisons nationwide for architectural, engineering and environmental services.

ADC: What are some of the biggest partnership successes you've seen?

LT. GEN. JONES: Currently, Fort Moore, Georgia has the largest IGSA portfolio within the Army. It has 18 IGSAs with local communities to reduce costs and maintain or improve existing installation support services. Partner areas include guardrail maintenance services, heating and air conditioning filter changing services and emergency generator maintenance services. Fort Moore also leverages two HQ IMCOM regional IGSAs with Auburn University and the University of Georgia for environmental, climate resilience, and architectural and engineering services. These services include forest management, environmental compliance, threatened and endangered species surveys, surface water delineations and climate change vulnerability assessments.

Fort Riley, Kansas has an IGSA with Geary County Unified School District that will save \$26 million for just two barracks renovation projects.

One of the largest and most successful IGSAs the Army has signed is a 10-year renewable partnership with Sourcewell, a Minnesota-based service cooperative. This partnership will help sustain installations across the nation by providing flexible and efficient alternatives to current contract options on a wide range of services, supplies and equipment.

ADC: IMCOM is, of course, headquartered at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas, in “Military City USA.” It’s no surprise that the San Antonio region and Texas in general have entered into some of the more innovative IGSAs. What response do you hear from community leaders, and what is the on-the-ground impact?

LT. GEN. JONES: IGSAs are mutually beneficial to IMCOM and the civilian communities that our soldiers, families and civilians call home. Our communities often approach us to establish partnerships, and we rely on our partners to find even greater efficiencies for our installations. We are part of the community, with nearly 70% of our soldier and family population living off base, and our relationships with our community partners is one of the ways we connect America’s Army to our communities. These IGSAs provide a new revenue stream for our civilian communities that allow them to hire additional city, county and state employees, from teachers to firefighters. IGSAs also help build the capacity and expertise to create new, innovative programs that lead to future savings for the Army and taxpayers.

ADC: What do you think IGSAs across the services will look like 10 years from now?

LT. GEN. JONES: Currently, IMCOM has included the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard in its partnerships with Texas, North Carolina and Alabama state departments of transportation. These DOTs provide airfield paving, storm water runoff engineering controls, traffic signal installation, maintenance and repair, signage, perimeter fencing and any other work associated with road paving services.

We also briefed the Army Reserve, Navy and Air Force on the effectiveness and potential of the Sourcewell IGSA, which has saved the Army 20% versus traditional procurement vehicles. IMCOM is also looking into ways to expand the funding sources for IGSA to include other funding streams such as working capital funds and non-appropriated funds. This change would vastly expand partnership opportunities for existing and new installations to include Army-owned industrial base installations and other sites. 📍



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT

Lt. Gen. Omar Jones, commanding general of Installation Management Command (IMCOM), greets an Army Community Service employee during his visit to U.S. Army Garrison Rheinland-Pfalz in Baumholder, Germany, July 31. Army photo by Linda Lambiotte

Randy Robinson, executive deputy to the commanding general, holds the recently signed Proclamation for the Intergovernmental Support Agreement for Environmental Services with Dr. Roel Lopez, Texas A&M University AgriLife Extension Director. Photo courtesy of IMCOM Public Affairs Office

Lt. Gen. Omar Jones, the commanding general of Army Installation Management Command, gives remarks during the IMCOM-Pacific Assumption of Responsibility Ceremony for incoming director Brenda Lee McCullough at Fort Shafter, Hawaii. Army photo by Robert Haynes

‘THERE WAS NO STEREOTYPE’

ADC spoke with Simone Gorrindo, author of *The Wives*, a memoir that explores the personal—and collective—experiences of military spouses.

BY GRACE MARVIN

Simone Gorrindo was 27, living in New York City, and had recently landed her dream job as an editor at a publishing house when her husband Andrew announced he was joining the Army. And not just that, he was joining an elite, combat special operations unit of the Army.

It was a curveball but not unexpected. Gorrindo had known about her husband’s dream of military service since early in their relationship; the couple had discussed it often.

Gorrindo quit her job. Her husband enlisted, and in November of 2012, Gorrindo found herself standing inside a small brick house with a “patchy lawn” in Columbus, Georgia.

“We won’t have to go to the laundromat,” she told Andrew as they walked through their new home, noting just one of many contrasts she would encounter. The life she’d left behind in the Northeast and her new life in a small, Southern military town could not have been more different.

Gorrindo chronicles her life-changing first years as an Army spouse in her memoir *The Wives*, which was released earlier this year by Simon & Schuster.

“At its heart [*The Wives*], is about being open to human connection, even if it’s uncomfortable and challenging, and in the most unlikely of places,” Gorrindo said. She said that during her time in Georgia, the sense of community she felt among her fellow military spouses was unlike anything she’d experienced before.

Gorrindo had hesitations about military life. She’d grown up among the fog, redwood trees and liberalism of Marin County, California, in a family that valued and instilled pacifist ideals. She also wasn’t going to give up her identity as an editor or a writer. Despite this, Gorrindo soon realized there was no way she was going to get through her husband’s frequent deployments alone. And more importantly, she didn’t want to.

“The women I met were fascinating and terrific and strong. The toughest people I’ve ever known,” Gorrindo said. And as she puts it in the book, “I wanted to be a part of it.”

Gorrindo quickly formed bonds with the other spouses. In the book, she depicts the diversity of the women

“ I felt like an unlikely Army wife and really, when it came down to it, there was no stereotype. We were all radically different and we had all not chosen this life, but we’d attached ourselves to it.”

(Right) *The Wives* was published in April 2024 by Scout Press. Photo courtesy of Simon & Schuster

she met in sharp detail, underscoring “that the Army itself is a cross section of humanity,” and explaining how the realities of military life require spouses to be independent but dependent at the same time. She became especially close with her neighbor and fellow spouse Rachel. When Andrew was deployed and Gorrindo was pregnant with her first child, she began sleeping at Rachel’s house so frequently that her phone began to register the location as her home.

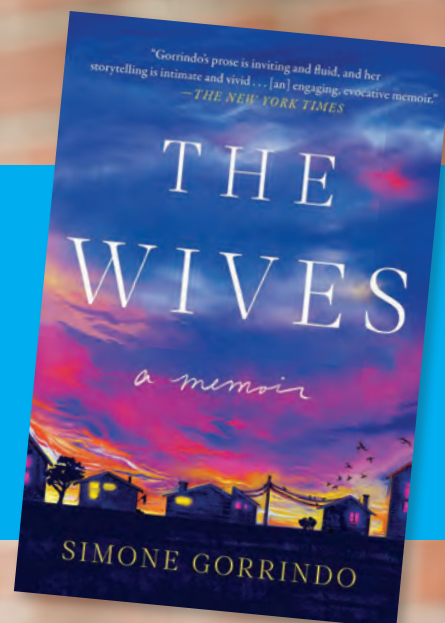
When asked why she wrote the book, Gorrindo laughed and says it’s a question she’s asked often. “There were conscious reasons I wrote it and unconscious reasons. Consciously, I really felt like the families who are holding things down in the defense communities don’t get much airtime. It’s not a life people think about very much.”

And the unconscious reasons? Throughout her memoir, Gorrindo is honest that during the early years of her marriage, her husband’s job challenged her personal beliefs and worldview.

“I needed to reconcile everything that I was conflicted about from the previous decade, in order to do the next decade [of his career/of Army life],” she explained. “So, I think, on a personal level, that’s why I wrote it.”

Today, Gorrindo lives in Tacoma, Washington. She’s an author, wife and mother and, yes, still a military spouse. 📖

Simone Gorrindo, the author of *The Wives*.
Photo by Jessica Uhler



IMPROVING FINANCIAL OUTCOMES FOR MILITARY FAMILIES, ONE STEP AT A TIME

USAA's JJ Montanaro talks money at a MilSpouseFest event in the D.C. area.
Photo courtesy of USAA



It's no secret that high housing prices, inflation and the rising cost of living have impacted all Americans in recent years. Military families, a group often already familiar with financial burdens because of frequent relocations and employment transitions, have felt the squeeze, too.

ADC spoke with JJ Montanaro, a certified financial planner at USAA, about the challenges military families face and the importance of building a culture of financial readiness among service members, their spouses and families.

ADC: USAA's mission is to help military families build financial security. What does that look like in today's world?

MONTANARO: Today, the world is complex and fast-paced. For military families, the added challenges of their lifestyle—PCS moves, deployments, spouse un- and underemployment—just compound the environmental challenges like inflation and a difficult housing market.

The fundamentals of financial security—managing cash flow and credit, saving and investing, and a plan that ties it all together—remain the same as they were nearly 30 years ago when I left active duty and started in the business. It's just harder.



Military spouses listen to a discussion about building a meaningful career at a MilSpouseFest event in San Antonio. Photo courtesy of USAA

ADC: What are some of the most common financial mistakes service members and their families make, and what can be done about them?

MONTANARO: At USAA, we think that doing the basics right, what we call our “core advice” is critical to financial security. Living a lifestyle where you spend less than you earn and you save consistently is a key component of that core advice. However, that doesn’t just magically happen. It takes a concerted effort and for families, a united effort. I always encourage the folks I interact with to be more deliberate and purposeful in how they approach money and money decisions.

ADC: What strategies has USAA found to be effective in promoting financial literacy and budgeting best practices in the military community?

MONTANARO: Our financial readiness program is designed to assess where a member is at—what they are doing well and where they might be able to improve—and providing very manageable and attainable “next steps.” There is nothing like success to breed more success. Let’s face it, the natural reaction to someone telling me I have a 57-page list of items to address is to throw up my arms and do nothing.

ADC: The USAA Educational Foundation recently partnered with the Military Spouse Advocacy Network (MSAN) to introduce a new virtual financial education program. Tell us about that program and why promoting financial literacy for military spouses is part of USAA’s mission.

MONTANARO: USAA is proud to sponsor the USAA Educational Foundation that provides free financial education resources tailored to the needs of the military. We know that often times, the CFO of the military household is the spouse, so the USAA Educational Foundation partnered with MSAN, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, to provide free resources to help better manage the military wallet. The USAA Educational Foundation has lots of free resources on all the major personal finance topics at usaaef.org.

ADC: What are some of the challenges service members face when transitioning out of the military?

MONTANARO: It’s a big move, but it’s also inevitable. We know it will happen, but we don’t necessarily control the timing. Work fuels most families’ financial engine. That makes finding a meaningful career the number one challenge. Specific to finances, I was talking to our advice team about

our point of view that service members should accumulate the equivalent of six to 12 months of expenses prior to leaving the military. The idea is sound: accumulate enough to “buy time” to allow you to choose the right career, not just choose a job out of necessity.

While that number makes financial sense, it’s probably not practical or possible for most military members or families. So, that’s a challenge. But, even if they don’t have the full 6-12 months, any amount they have saved will help reduce stress during the transition to civilian life. We also encourage transitioning service members to consider and plan for potential budget additions to replace lost benefits like Servicemembers’ Group Life Insurance and health care.

ADC: How can defense communities support military families on their financial journeys?

MONTANARO: Financial literacy and education provide the foundation for financial security. To that end, supporting programs and initiatives across the community that promote and enable programs in this arena is critical. The military is a microcosm of our society. A better educated and more financially savvy community will be a good thing for our communities and for our military. 📱

ENERGIZING DEFENSE COMMUNITIES FOR GREAT POWER COMPETITION:

A CONVERSATION WITH THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE

RAVI CHAUDHARY

The Department of the Air Force, which includes both the Air Force and Space Force, has announced a series of sweeping initiatives to prepare for future global challenges. ADC reached out to Ravi Chaudhary, assistant secretary of the Air Force for energy, installations, and the environment, to garner insight on Great Power Competition (GPC), its implications for installations and the role defense communities can play.

ADC: The Air Force recently announced the GPC strategy. Can you talk broadly about what this strategy is and the immediate and long-term global threats that have made this effort imperative?

CHAUDHARY: I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on this crucial subject. Our nation has entered a decade of consequence, and I want to bring this message to our defense communities, raw and real. The military is facing a significant shift in the strategic security environment. The People's Republic of China (PRC) harbors intentions and a growing capacity to reshape the international order for its benefit. This includes one of the largest military buildups in modern history. Added to this, Russia's unprovoked aggression in Ukraine has shattered peace in Europe. Frankly, we are smack dab in the middle of a Great Power Competition, and losing is not an option.

To meet this challenge, [Air Force] Secretary [Frank] Kendall launched a focused sprint to re-optimize the department for GPC. In February, the department unveiled sweeping plans for re-optimizing the Department of the Air Force to deter and, if necessary, prevail. Through a series of key decisions, four core areas were identified: Develop People, Generate Readiness, Project Power and Develop Capabilities.

ADC: What would a global conflict with China and/or Russia mean for Air Force installations and defense communities?

CHAUDHARY: Our bases are the platforms from which we project combat power, and we're good at it, damn good if I may say so. However, we need to adapt, change our mindset to a new regime of threats. During the GPC analysis, our installation teams took a close look and came up with two major findings.

Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall, left, shakes hands with Ravi Chaudhary after swearing him in as the assistant secretary of the Air Force for energy, installations and the environment, at the Pentagon April 7, 2023. Air Force photo by Eric Dietrich



First, our installations are not a monolith, and we can't treat them that way. Since taking on this role, I have traveled to 45 installations, and what I've found is that our bases are as diverse as our mission sets. We have locations with missions that are "Employed-In-Place" like Schriever Space Force Base, Colorado, where power and connectivity are critical. Other installations, including our fighter bases, have the job of getting the jets out of town and into the fight so they can deliver decisive blows to adversaries. These bases need ramp space, good hangars and robust runways. We also have space and missile launch facilities, complex training bases, test centers and joint bases where we are responsible for all the services.

This leads to our second finding. Our adversaries have demonstrated the capability and intent to attack our installations through both kinetic and non-kinetic means. They will disrupt our networks, go after our critical infrastructure and drive civil chaos in communities adjacent to our bases. This concerns me the most, because the asymmetric approach our adversaries plan to employ can impact our ability to get jets out of town and into the fight. During World War II, the father of the Air Force, Gen. Hap Arnold said, "Our bases are the determining factor in air operations." If that is true, and I certainly believe it is, we have to embrace the reality that our installations—even our CONUS installations—are no longer a sanctuary from today's threats.

ADC: How should local communities and state governments work with the Air Force to prepare for such scenarios?

CHAUDHARY: First of all, join us in acknowledging this new reality. Then partner with us to build more resilient communities, before we find ourselves unable to meet the moment in a time of real crisis. As I meet with our outstanding stakeholders, it's easy to see that there is a lot that we are getting right, but there is more work to be done. That's what I've been on a mission to do for the past year.



Ravi Chaudhary receives a brief from Air Force Col. David Wilson, the Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson and 673d Air Base Wing commander, during a visit to Alaska. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Derek Seifert

ADC: With the ever-changing landscape of global conflict, how might the roles of defense communities and installations need to evolve five or 10 years down the line? What does that look like?

CHAUDHARY: This is the good part, and I really mean this—the work I see going on between our installations and communities is truly phenomenal. However, we need to do more partnering. The kind of conflict we're talking about in GPC will be unlike anything we've ever experienced, and we'll be in it together. Our adversaries will be coming after our electrical grids, our water supply or essential control systems that govern them all. This means we're going to have to take the partnership between our installations and their surrounding communities to an all-new level.

The good news is that we are off to a good start. Installations are striking up third-party utilities privatization efforts that are jumpstarting economies and ruggedizing our bases. Localities are benefiting from things like state licenses for our new microreactor at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska and power-sharing agreements with the community in places like Edwards Air Force Base, California that reduce grid stress on the community.

There is still work to be done. I'm sure you've seen in the news examples of encroachment and purchase of lands adjacent to our bases by foreign or unknown entities. These activities pose serious national security threats.

Chambers of commerce must work closely with installation leadership and bring in the right authorities to deal with this challenge; it will require partnering beyond what we are used to.

Additionally, we'll have to see utilities as a continuum of the base, and strike partnerships and protocols that solidify national security priorities across the interagency and also ensure community needs are met. We'll also need to match DOD funding to Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funding to deliver redundant power systems like geo-thermal, wind and solar that can bring in power sharing and uplift whole systems.

Considering the challenge, the role of defense communities and installations will be more important than ever. We will need to work together to come up with innovative ways to increase resilience and ensure quality housing for our service members and their families.

If there is one thing I've seen with my own eyes across 30 years of service, it's the unbreakable bond between our installations and defense communities. As the President regularly states, we have many obligations, but only one that is truly sacred: ensuring the men and women executing their daily mission are cared for. Amidst all the challenges we face as a nation, that's the one imperative that gives me focus—and keeps me going every day. 🇺🇸



INSTALLATION INNOVATION FORUM

SAVE THE DATE

OCTOBER 27-29, 2025 ★ MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

Installation Innovation Forum heads west to the stunning central coast of California, where a rich military history spans more than two centuries. Home to the *Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center* and the *Naval Postgraduate School*, and the birthplace of groundbreaking military-community partnerships, Monterey is proud to host IIF 2025.



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THE CITY OF
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Marine Corps Sgt. Josiah Rushing, a member of the Quantico Marine Corps Band, performs during a St. Patrick's Day Parade in Boston March 17. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Joaquin Dela Torre



HAPPENING ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Every year, we send out a call to America's defense communities to collect stories about what's happening in their regions. This year we're sharing stories about building the future of the cybersecurity workforce, a restorative justice program for veterans convicted of non-violent crimes, and how goats are helping to protect training grounds on an Army base.

Want to read more community stories? Flip to page 28 for news from Great American Defense Communities.



VETERANS GET A SECOND CHANCE IN NEBRASKA

★ NEBRASKA

A law passed this year by the Nebraska legislature provides a second chance to veterans convicted of non-violent, parole-eligible crimes.

The diversion program, recommended by the Veterans Justice Commission and run through the Nebraska Department of Veterans' Affairs, gives justice-connected veterans mental and physical support as they work to heal and address mental health challenges that may be lingering from their time in the military. The program also includes access to a support group composed of retired military members.

"Traditional sentencing isolates people from their community and does not address the root causes of criminal behavior, such as mental health issues or substance misuse," said Lindsey Kirchhoff, policy advisor for the commission. "Diversion programs can provide a supportive environment for veterans to get evidence-based treatment which can resolve underlying behavioral health concerns more effectively than incarceration."

Although Nebraska is the first state to enact such legislation—which is set to be implemented in 2025—the buzz around the program may encourage more states to adopt the policy.

"The Veterans Justice Commission staff is actively engaged in discussions about the policy framework with state policymakers, leaders who champion veterans' causes, and organizations dedicated to serving veterans" Kirchhoff continued. "We are in conversation with over a dozen states about the framework and how it can improve the lives of individual veterans and their families while also enhancing community safety."

—ASA RHODEN

Judge John Colborn presents a certificate of achievement to a veteran's court graduate in 2019. The new legislation will build on the existing program, adding even more restorative justice opportunities for veterans who qualify. Photo courtesy of the Nebraska Supreme Court



FORT EISENHOWER'S BYTE-SIZED BOOT CAMP

★ AUGUSTA, GEORGIA

In a year marked by global IT malfunctions and rising information technology concerns, cybersecurity is on the minds of many DOD and defense community leaders.

Fort Eisenhower, Georgia is doing its part to train the next generation of cybersecurity experts by hosting CyberPatriot camps to introduce middle and high school students to careers in information technology and help them learn foundational skills. While cybersecurity might not be top of mind for many young people, the camp aims to inspire excitement and demonstrate the importance of the field to students of diverse backgrounds.

"There are so many different things we do in what we call cyber," said Dave Basel, a cybersecurity practitioner with the National Security Agency. The students "probably will find something enjoyable and a path for them, and that's what I want to expose."

The program has already shown success, with many students returning for advanced lessons and expressing interest in entering STEM fields.

Fort Eisenhower's initiative has also inspired other local institutions to begin offering cybersecurity instruction, contributing not only to the future of cybersecurity but also to the greater Augusta region's high-tech workforce and modernization.

—ALFONSO LANDEROS

Student receiving assistance during the 2024 AFA CyberCamp Photo courtesy of Alliance for Fort Eisenhower





Navy Federal employees pose with their donated dresses in Fox Creek, Texas in April 2024. Photo courtesy of Navy Federal Credit Union

HELPING MILITARY SPOUSES DRESS FOR SUCCESS

★ KILLEEN, TEXAS

In Texas, Navy Federal Credit Union teamed up with Fort Cavazos Spouses Club's Operation Deploy Your Dress to provide formal dress donations for military spouses. Operation Deploy Your Dress has been giving away formal wear to the military community at no cost since 2015, starting from a single location in Fort Bliss, then expanding to 13 locations across the country and one in Germany. The program is completely volunteer- and donation-based.

"As a military spouse, I know how much I look forward to celebrating the annual military ball. But I also know how the extra expenses for those events can add up," said Brandi Gomez, Navy Federal's manager of corporate social responsibility. "These employees, many of whom are veterans or military spouses themselves, possess genuine care and empathy for this cause, and they choose to donate formal wear items as a way of paying it forward for the experiences they were so grateful to have had in their own lives."

Navy Federal gathered staff from all branches in the area to help contribute and provided a group donation that allowed Operation Deploy Your Dress to give away over 1,200 new or gently used formal attire items to military spouses.

—ASA RHODEN

GOAT WEED WHACKERS

★ FORT MCCOY, WISCONSIN

Durning National Invasive Species Awareness Week, Fort McCoy, Wisconsin worked with the Monroe County Invasive Species Working Group to host a series of field days to educate the public on the impacts of invasive species and work together on management efforts.

The base came together with the public to hold workshops and do volunteer work with the goal of reducing the growth of invasive plants across the base's training areas. Volunteers were also joined by a group of hardworking guests: goats.

"A unique weapon Fort McCoy has been employing against invasive species is goats. Yes... goats," said Kevin Luepke, a wildlife biologist with the Fort McCoy Directorate of Public Works Environmental Division Natural Resources Branch. "More than 100 goats have been used to combat invasive species, and they are quite effective at it too."

The base has used goats in their land management practices since 2023 to save labor time and reduce costs.

—MACY MATHENY

A goat grazes at Fort McCoy, Wisconsin to combat the growth of invasive plant species. Army photo by Claudia Neve



THE SPACE FORCE'S NEW FIRE STATION

★ NEW BOSTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE



In New Boston, New Hampshire, the community plans to revitalize an important public resource—a local

fire station—with the help of a 2023 Defense Community Infrastructure Program (DCIP) grant.

The New Boston Fire Department serves the New Boston Space Force Station and the local community.

The planned fire house renovation includes a complete modernization, becoming fully equipped with HAZMAT services and other enhanced response gear, and improving communication between the fire department and the installation.

DCIP "continues to be a critical program that demonstrates the importance of the relationship between installations and their surrounding communities in delivering critical infrastructure needs to support military service members, their families and their communities," said William A. LaPlante, undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment. 📌

—ALFONSO LANDEROS

Renovation work at the New Boston Fire Department began in May 2024. Photo courtesy of New Boston Fire Department



CELEBRATING

50

GREAT AMERICAN DEFENSE COMMUNITIES

With the addition of this year's three communities, ADC and USAA have reached the milestone of recognizing 50 communities as part of the Great American Defense Communities program. To celebrate, we checked in with our past GADCs and share stories from our 2024 communities.

KEY

CLASS OF 2024	CLASS OF 2019
CLASS OF 2023	CLASS OF 2018
CLASS OF 2022	CLASS OF 2017
CLASS OF 2021	CLASS OF 2016
CLASS OF 2020	





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BUILDING SOLUTIONS TO BLACK HILLS HOUSING CHALLENGES

During the past few years, South Dakota's Black Hills area has seen unprecedented growth as new residents moved to the community during the pandemic.

BY WILLONA SLOAN

“Just like the rest of the country, our housing has become an issue in the last four or five years,” said Scott Landguth, executive director of the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority. “But it’s not just the Air Force. If you’re a young person graduating or a teacher or a nurse or policeman, fireman, anyone starting out, the market is tough to buy in or to find a rental home.”



A home in the Rushmore Heights housing area is photographed at Ellsworth Air Force Base, South Dakota Aug. 24, 2020. Air Force photo by Airman Quentin Marx

The area is home to Ellsworth Air Force Base and Camp Rapid. Because of its proximity to popular outdoor activities and Mount Rushmore, short-term rentals for tourists also take hundreds of units off the rental market. To ease the housing crunch, several local entities, including the Black Hills Military Advisory Coalition (BHMAC), collaborate to share housing information and find ways to add more affordable housing stock.

Comprised of professionals that represent different aspects of housing in the area, the Housing Partner program of the BHMAC Housing Subcommittee provides an “avenue of information sharing and connecting resources that focus on easing the burden for military members to secure housing,” said Rebecca Pisle, the subcommittee’s lead.

BHMAC has also helped expand the Black Hills Wire website, which allows community housing partners to list available units, while also providing incentives and discounts to military members and their families.

“Our local community development team is very supportive of the ongoing development with a focus on affordability,” Pisle said. “As developers work with the city to find ways to reduce the cost associated with developing land, housing partners are reaching out to ask how they can help.”

The committee has met with realtors, property managers, builders and developers to build housing partner connections. “[We have] had several opportunities to present our focus, connecting military to housing resources, to potential housing partners, allowing us to build connections and make forward progress,” Pisle said.

Government funding programs are also helping offset costs for developing affordable units. Two years ago, South Dakota set aside \$200 million to promote affordable housing, using a grant funding program for developers.

The Ellsworth Development Authority was also successful in working with its congressional delegation to secure \$39 million from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to establish housing trust funds that can be



Airmen and community members participate in the 38th Annual McBride Military Appreciation BBQ. Photos courtesy of Black Hills Military Advisory Coalition

BHMAC CREATES COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

With three major pillars, the BHMAC seeks to bring leaders together to strengthen the connection between the military and community. The coalition works to improve the quality of life for service members and their families, increase community outreach and support, and build on the thriving defense economy.

BHMAC sponsors events such as the annual Military Appreciation BBQ, which is in its 38th year. “The basis of it is a way for the community to show appreciation to our military members. It’s not just Ellsworth, it’s all military members, including South Dakota Guard, and any of the other service branches that may have members stationed here in the Black Hills area,” said Tony Nishimura, military community relations director for the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority and a BHMAC member.

Another way that BHMAC supports members of the military is by making them feel instantly welcome when they come to town. “Once they arrive here, we want to welcome them with open arms,” he said.

Led by a local tour company, a daylong tour for new airmen features the sights of the local area, including an outdoor excursion, such as tubing, archery or fishing.

“We want to give them a taste of what is available here in the Black Hills,” Nishimura said. “We want to make sure they understand that the community welcomes you. We want you here. We’re here to support you.”

used to provide low-interest loans for development projects that include more affordable units.

“It won’t be the entire funding for a project, but hopefully if they build a 100-unit apartment building, maybe 10 or 15 of those [units] are always being locked in at an affordable rate that the airmen could afford,” Landguth said. “That is a small piece—not the entire answer, but it’s something we’re hoping is going to help the Air Force and a lot of other professions that need some help right now, too. Housing is a complicated issue. We can’t fix everything locally. But what we can do is try to make it better whatever way we can.”

In addition to its current population, the Black Hills area will see a gradual influx of members of the military, with the arrival of new bomber planes, B-21 Raiders, the *South Dakota Searchlight* reported in November 2023. An additional 4,000

people, to include service members, staff and families, will move to the area over the next decade.

Working together, the community will continue to look for ways to solve housing challenges for members of the military and the community as a whole.

“Military members sacrifice a lot as they are required to move to meet mission requirements while protecting our freedoms. When military members settle into communities that support and appreciate them it can positively impact the quality of life for [them] and their families,” Pisle said.

“When the Black Hills area was in a housing crisis, the community didn’t dismiss the fact that our military members were struggling to secure places to live. We are so fortunate to live in a community that truly respects and cares about military members.” 🇺🇸



COAST GUARD MARATHON CREATES BUZZ IN ELIZABETH CITY

A new sporting event has raised the profile of Elizabeth City, North Carolina to a national and even international level. Elizabeth City is home to Coast Guard Base Elizabeth City and hosts the annual Coast Guard Marathon. The event brings together thousands of local community members with visitors from around the country and the world.

BY WILLONA SLOAN

“You can see the excitement. You can look at the foot traffic in our downtown area, across our city, in restaurants. You can hear the buzz,” City Manager Montré Freeman said.

The inaugural Coast Guard Marathon was held in-person in 2022 and included around 1,800 runners. The small, rural city of less than 25,000 residents had not hosted such a large-scale event before, but as excitement has grown, so have registrations. This year’s marathon included more than 2,200 runners.

In addition to the full marathon, half marathon and 5K, participants could also register for The Semper Paratus Challenge, named for the Coast Guard’s motto, meaning “Always Ready.” Race weekend also included activities and games for the whole family, such as the Coast Guard Marathon Expo, Toast to the Coast Guard Dinner, Finish Line Festival and After Party.

It was a community-wide event. This year’s first race registrant was Mayor E. Kirk Rivers.

“That’s the level of pride and appreciation we have in having Coasties here in our city,” Freeman said. In addition to gathering runners, fans and supporters,



(Left to right) Members of Base Elizabeth City cheer on finishers of the inaugural Coast Guard Marathon March 6, 2022. / The official Coast Guard Marathon finisher medal features the Lockheed Martin HC-130J in front of a 33-foot Special Purpose Craft—Law Enforcement boat. / Volunteers lay out finisher medals for the inaugural Coast Guard Marathon. Coast Guard photos by Andrew Winz

the Coast Guard Marathon brought out hundreds of volunteers, who beautified the race route, assisted participants, served food and provided entertainment.

“The marathon is one more way of showing how high-performing, how incredibly enthusiastic and dedicated the Coast Guard is. It’s just one demonstration of the military ethos and discipline that they bring to our town and the spirit of service,” said Jon Hawley, Elizabeth City’s grants administrator.

The idea for hosting a marathon in partnership with the Coast Guard came about a few years ago, through conversations among city administrators, Visit Elizabeth City, and Base Elizabeth City leadership. The Coast Guard now manages the race with the city’s support.

“The city has made a huge investment into the Coast Guard Marathon. The county has, and many different entities have,” Freeman said. The investments have paid off. In an April 5, 2024 WKTR News3 report, Race Director Victoria West said that “as the race has grown, so too has that economic impact: from \$700,000 in 2022 to around \$1 million this year.”

This year’s race medals featured an image of the commissioned Fast Response Cutter Nathan Bruckenthal and featured the race theme of “Bravery in Battle.”

The cutter is named after DC3 Nathan B. Bruckenthal, who was killed in the Iraq War, becoming the first to die in wartime action since the Vietnam War, according to the Coast Guard Marathon website.

The Coast Guard Marathon has been designated as a Boston Marathon qualifying event, and next year it will become an Olympic qualifying event, as well.

The marathon route starts and ends downtown, and runs through Base Elizabeth City, giving runners a grand tour of the area, showing off its vitality and charm. As more people come and experience the strong sense of community in Elizabeth City, they fall in love with the place.

“Elizabeth City is blessed to have a unique vibe,” Hawley said. “People are now understanding what a destination we are. We still have that small town charm. It’s attractive to people. We’re getting some noise and getting people’s attention across the world.” 🌍

SPECIAL DESIGNATION HONORS THE COAST GUARD COMMUNITY

The Coast Guard City program recognizes communities that support local Coast Guard members. A city, municipality, or county can earn the designation “Coast Guard City” by making special efforts to acknowledge the professional work of the members of the Coast Guard assigned to their region. Elizabeth City earned its official designation with a successful application in 2015. To date, 34 communities have earned the designation.

“I’m very proud of that connection with the Coast Guard. I get to work very closely with Commander Heidi Koski, who also served as one of the marathon’s organizers this year,” said City Manager Montre Freeman.

“We love what they do. We love what they represent, and we love how they do it,” he continued. “Base Elizabeth City is responsible for a large portion of water and air protection, not only here in North Carolina, but across the world. I absolutely love them as an entity and I love them as people and as leaders.”



SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS IN FORT SMITH

Recruiting students for ROTC has always been a challenge, but at the University of Arkansas—Fort Smith (UAFS), it's a challenge that's being met head-on with innovation and collaboration. In the past few years, the ROTC program and university have worked closely together. That partnership has seen the program go from averaging six to eight cadets each year with about 33% of them not making it through all four years to where it is today: 21 cadets enrolled with an expected increase of seven for the spring semester.

BY MARK PARROTT

This close collaboration between the ROTC program and UAFS leadership is one of the key reasons for the program's recent growth and success. "I can walk over to the chancellor's office and have a direct conversation about ways to improve the program," said Christian Bradley, assistant professor of military science at UAFS. "I've done that, and within weeks, we've seen improvements, like better wi-fi and a building facelift. The university is truly invested in the success of this program, and that's something you don't see at many larger universities."



(At right and below) ROTC cadets participate in a team-building exercise at the University of Arkansas—Fort Smith. UAFS photos by Johnathan Brewer





To better integrate ROTC into campus life, UAFS has made significant investments in the program's facilities and resources. ROTC cadets now have their own designated classrooms and regularly use the campus Recreation and Wellness Center for physical training. "Our cadets are working out alongside non-ROTC students, which helps break down barriers and builds camaraderie," UAFS Chancellor Terisa C. Riley said.

The program looks for students who embody the "SAL" qualities: scholar, athlete and leader. Finding students who fit this profile in the River Valley, a small, rural region of western Arkansas, can be tough. However, the program's recent surge in recruitment numbers suggests that their strategy is working. "We've shifted away from traditional methods like setting up tables at high schools, which weren't very effective. Instead, we've partnered with UAFS recruiters to gain access to schools, even those hesitant to allow military recruitment," he said.

The key to UAFS's success has been humanizing the program and focusing on building relationships. Organizations like the Military Officers Association of America have also helped, particularly in connecting with parents—an often overlooked but crucial audience. "Convincing parents has been key. Once they understand the financial and leadership benefits, students follow," Bradley said.

"Before I joined, I thought that ROTC was similar to JROTC. I believed it was a club and didn't have any benefits associated with it," said MS4 Cadet Victor Steffen, a senior at UAFS and the cadet commander for the UAFS ROTC Company. Like many students, he had heard the negative stereotypes surrounding ROTC and assumed it wasn't aligned with his interests or goals. "People make misguided assumptions and poor comments, stating that everyone in the program is weird or has some sense

of elevated egos surrounding their future service or patriotism."

It wasn't until a recruiter approached him that he began to see the real value of the program. "I realized the ROTC wasn't just about military service; it was about becoming a better version of myself and helping others grow. Through ROTC, I developed leadership skills I wouldn't have found anywhere else," he said.

The ROTC program at UAFS stands out as a beacon for students looking for leadership, financial security and practical career skills. With strong university support, access to premier training facilities and a renewed focus on recruitment, the program is shaping future leaders, both in and out of uniform.

For those who join, ROTC is more than just a military pathway. It's an opportunity to grow, lead and graduate with a bright future ahead. "ROTC gave me the tools I need to achieve my dreams, not just in the Army, but in life," Steffen said. 📌

A student participates in a STEM laboratory day in the hangar bay of Logistics Support Squadron 56 during Naval Air Station Oceana's annual Air Show in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Navy photo by Petty Officer 2nd Class Tyra Watson



A photograph of two women smiling and holding large American flags. The woman on the right is wearing a blue t-shirt with the "Navy Federal Serves" logo and an orange cap. The background shows a field with many more flags under a clear blue sky.

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CHECKING IN WITH GREAT AMERICAN DEFENSE COMMUNITIES



ADC's Grace Marvin interviews two volunteers with Coastal Georgia's USO organization at Hunter Army Airfield in 2021. ADC photo

PARTNERSHIPS & PROGRESS IN COASTAL GEORGIA

★ COASTAL GEORGIA

Since being named a Great American Defense Community in 2021, the Coastal Georgia region, home to Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield, has been busier than ever forging new partnerships and creating new opportunities for service members and civilians alike.

Recently, a \$100-million, 10-year regional intergovernmental support agreement was signed with the University of Georgia to provide environmental assistance to Fort Liberty, Fort Moore,

Fort Novosel, Fort Stewart, Hunter Army Airfield, Fort Johnson and Redstone Arsenal. This partnership focuses on climate resilience while benefiting the surrounding communities.

On July 25, 2024, National Hire a Veteran Day, the city of Hinesville reinforced its support for veterans by signing an agreement with the Army's Partnership for Your Success Program, demonstrating the city's commitment to helping soldiers transition from military to civilian life.

Additionally, the Coastal Georgia coalition has secured numerous funds and resources for the military, including support for the Combat Readiness Training Center and the new C-130J aircraft for the 165th Airwing in Savannah. They have also opened the Stephen A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Aspire Health, the first of its kind in rural Georgia, to provide mental health counseling for military personnel and their families.

—MACY MATHENY

PRIORITIZING HEALTHCARE

★ GREATER FORT KNOX REGION, KENTUCKY

When Fort Knox's on-base hospital closed in 2020, service members and their families were left with only one on-base clinic, which was a quarter of the size of the former hospital. The vacancy was recognized by the greater community, so a plan was developed to expand a health clinic located just outside the base. This clinic reopened in 2022 as Baptist Health Hardin and offers greatly expanded services.

"Hospital leaders have always recognized the vital role our military plays, not just in serving our country, but also as a large part of our local economy and the social fabric of our communities," said Robert Ramey, president of Baptist Health Hardin. "It is our duty and our pleasure to give back to those who have made so many personal sacrifices for our nation."

The expansion of Baptist Health Hardin was made possible by community investments, including a \$1.5 million investment from a local lender, Abound Credit Union.

"Abound understands the full picture and how we can play a steady role through constant support," said Kayla Vanmeter, communications manager at Abound Credit Union. "We will never waver in the ultimate privilege to support our military and their families."

—ASA RHODEN

Leaders from Baptist Health Hardin, Baptist Health Medical Group and Abound Credit Union meet for the ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the grand re-opening of the practice after its renovation. Photo courtesy of Baptist Health Hardin



Dignitaries prepare to cut the paper chain to mark the opening of the new Denegee Child Development Center. Army photo by Eve Baker

A NEW CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

★ FAIRBANKS NORTH STAR BOROUGH, ALASKA

Military families stationed in Fairbanks North Star Borough, Alaska now have access to a new, state-of-the-art child development center. The Denegee Child Development Center is named after the Tanana Alaska native word for "moose."

The 42,930-square-foot facility can accommodate 284 children, from infants to kindergarteners, and features 22 classrooms, a multipurpose room and a nursing room. The walls are adorned with artwork by native Alaskan artists, reflecting the region's respect for indigenous culture and fostering a sense of community.

"By providing quality, affordable childcare, the Denegee Child Development Center not only supports installation and mission readiness, but also aligns with ADC's 'One Community, One Mission,' motto," said Brittany Smart, associate DOD liaison, community and research, at the University of Alaska Fairbanks and an ADC Federal Outreach and Advisory Council member.

Additionally, the University of Alaska, Fairbanks has partnered with the center to offer on-site early childhood education, providing new staff with childcare training, certificate credits and degree opportunities.

—MACY MATHENY





Community, base and spouse leaders cut the ribbon on opening day for the new Spouse Resource Center. Army photo by Brian Hill

A NEW HUB FOR MILITARY SPOUSES

★ FORT LEONARD WOOD, MISSOURI

Military spouses often face difficulties securing employment, education or connection to the local community when they are frequently relocating.

Fort Leonard Wood's Spouse Resource Center opened its doors in Missouri in January 2024 to make it easier to overcome those challenges. The goal of the center is to support the professional and personal goals of people married to soldiers.

Services provided at the center include resume workshops and resources about employment and education opportunities. Before the hub opened, resources for spouses were spread out across different base offices and community locations. Consolidating the resources into one center will make it easier for spouses to find what they need, as well as establish a space to connect with those in similar situations.

"When we're able to help them find employment or we're able to help them enroll in college education, we consider that a success," said Walter Harris, transition service manager at Fort Leonard Wood.

—SOPHIE STETKIEWICZ



Volunteers assemble items to distribute for the "Welcome to Military Bay, USA" initiative. Photo courtesy of Tampa Bay Chamber

WELCOME TO MILITARY BAY, USA!

★ TAMPA BAY, FLORIDA

In 2022, the Tampa Bay Chamber of Commerce in Florida launched a creative campaign to publicize its military pride. After trademarking the phrase, "Military Bay USA," the chamber encouraged local businesses to share their support of MacDill Air Force Base by displaying the Military Bay USA logo. By June 2024, 80 businesses had pledged their support.

To take the campaign a step further, the chamber partnered with Walmart to create and distribute "Welcome to Military Bay, USA" welcome bags that contain common household items and are distributed to service members and their families at the newcomers orientation. By helping families avoid repurchasing staple household goods, the initiative helps offset relocation costs.

—KAT SHARMA



COMMUNITY SOARS

★ CENTRAL ARKANSAS

Since its recognition as a Great American Defense Community in 2019, Central Arkansas has hosted multiple events to bring the community, industry and the Air Force together. In 2023, after a five-year hiatus, the region brought back the Thunder Over the Rock Air Show, which drew a record-breaking 277,000 attendees and won the title of #1 Thunderbirds Airshow that year.

In May 2024, General Minihan, the Air Mobility Command Commander, hosted the rededication of the Col. Kenneth Walters Community Center at Little Rock Air Force Base in honor of the late Col. Kenneth Walters. As part of this rededication, the Little Rock Air Force Base Community Council covered all the costs associated with the new signage, a bronze bust of Col. Walters and a memorial display within the Walters Center.

In August 2024, the Herk Nation Legacy Monument was unveiled in Heritage Park at Little Rock Air Force Base. This project was made possible by a \$100,000 fundraising commitment from the Community Council. Along with the monument, the Herk Nation Legacy Award was established to honor the men and women of Herk Nation who have reached the highest levels of public service. Their first honoree is former Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton A. Schwartz.

—KAT SHARMA

Col. Denny Davies, 19th Airlift Wing commander and Daniel Gray, Little Rock Air Force Base Community Council president, applaud after unveiling the Herk Nation Legacy Monument. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Hannah Bean





Beta Club volunteers stand in a freshly planted flower bed at the Natural Resources compound at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Army photo by Chris Gardner

PARTNERSHIPS & PROGRESS IN OKLAHOMA

★ LAWTON, OKLAHOMA

The natural resources division at Fort Sill, Oklahoma collaborated with Cache Public School's Beta Club to create an ecosystem-strengthening pollinator planting program. Student volunteers are working to construct botanical habitats that will allow different species of pollinators to thrive on the base.

In March 2024, the student volunteers broke ground on the project. Some of the species they focused on preserving are monarch butterflies, bumblebees and Argos skippers, all of which have been threatened by habitat loss and the changing environment.

Andi White, member of the Cache Beta Club, has high hopes for the project's impact on the community. "My goal is to excite younger kids about contributing to their community and to demonstrate that giving back can be both fun and rewarding," White said.

—SOPHIE STETKIEWICZ



LEADING INNOVATION IN UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS

★ GRAND FORKS, NORTH DAKOTA

Since being recognized as a Great American Defense Community in 2016, the Grand Forks community has made significant strides. In 2017, Grand Forks Air Force Base, North Dakota realigned from Air Mobility Command to Air Combat Command, placing it under the major command that organizes, trains and equips airmen for remotely piloted aircraft missions. The base also operates the nation's High Frequency Global Communications System, which manages signals and emergency action messages globally for the President, senior federal leaders and all DOD agencies.

Adjacent to the base is Grand Sky, a 217-acre Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) research and development park created through a partnership between Grand Sky, the Air Force and Grand Forks County. Grand Sky hosts the Northern Plains UAS Test Site for beyond visual line of sight flights and is a leader among the seven Federal Aviation Administration UAS test sites in the U.S.

—KAT SHARMA

Grand Forks Mayor Brandon Bonchenski (center) tours the Grand Forks Air Force Base. Photo courtesy of city of Grand Forks



Col. Patrick Kolesiak, 55th Mission Support Group commander, and Shawna Forsberg, United Way of the Midlands CEO and president, pose with members of their organizations at the launch of the Military and Family Helpline 211. Photo courtesy of 55th Wing Public Affairs Office

OFFUTT DEBUTS A CRISIS HELPLINE

★ GREATER OMAHA, NEBRASKA

In June 2024, Military and Family Readiness at Offutt Air Force Base, Nebraska partnered with United Way of the Midlands (UWM) to launch the Military and Family Helpline 211. The collaboration addresses the needs of military-connected individuals—veterans, active-duty members, and their families—by providing 24/7 access to essential resources like housing, healthcare, and employment assistance. The helpline builds on UWM's existing 211 contact center, offering confidential support via phone, web, text and app, using a ZIP code-based system to connect users with nearby services.

This innovative approach is expected to streamline resources. By reducing the need for in-person appointments, the process for receiving support will become more efficient.

"This partnership enhances our capability to offer military members, veterans and families seamless access to vital quality of life support," said Col. Patrick Kolesiak, commander of the 55th Mission Support Group. 📞

—ALFONSO LANDEROS

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With 35 training ranges, 51 maneuver areas, and 89 training sites across 63,270 acres, Fort Leonard Wood's geographic footprint is free from encroachment, environmental, and noise concerns. Additionally, FLW offers 16.8 million square feet of facilities, 2,690 buildings for highly technical training and support activities, a joint-use airport with 6,040 feet of available runway, and 27.7 miles of railway. In 2025, the Military Health System/Defense Health Agency will open the newly constructed \$400M General Leonard Wood Community Hospital on the installation.

MISSION

Each year, FLW trains over 70,000 active service members and civilians and 12-13,000 Reserve component service members. We are one of four Basic Combat Training Installations and home to the U.S. Army Military Police, Engineer, and Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Schools. Joint service training includes the largest contingent of Marines outside of a Navy or Marine base, as well as Air Force and Navy personnel and we conduct Advanced Individual Training for all DOD Motor Transport service members.

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The Fort Leonard Wood Region spans four counties with 158,000 residents and over 3,000 square miles. Our region is dedicated to continuously improving quality of life including affordable housing, high performing public schools, access to quality health care, availability of affordable child care, mental health care access, employment opportunities for military spouses and transitioning service members, and improved transportation access with daily commercial jet service from the joint-use airport located on Fort Leonard Wood.

Winner of the 2023

COMMANDER IN CHIEF'S INSTALLATION OF EXCELLENCE AWARD

A LEGACY AND A WAY FORWARD

Harold Bradley and Harry Miller, World War II Army veterans, reunite during an Honor Flight trip at the World War II Memorial in Washington D.C. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Bryan Franks

Defense communities have been integral to the military since the nation's earliest days. In many cases, they have grown with their nearby installations. In others, they've been forced to reimagine their local economies and workforce, with the support of ADC and others.



WHEN CHANGE COMES, 'YA GOTTA WANNA' MAKE THE MOST OF IT

LIFE AFTER REALIGNMENT OR CLOSURE

Throughout ADC's history, its defense community members across the country have seen their local installations' missions change, grow or shrink, often through federal adoption of a Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) plan. Faced with economic change in their regions, community leaders have been forced to reimagine the real property, workforce and mission to thrive.

One successful redevelopment project is TexAmericas Center near Texarkana in Bowie County, Texas, which was home to the World War II-era Lone Star Army Ammunition Plant and Red River Army Depot, adjacent installations covering almost 40,000 acres. The 1995 BRAC plan changed missions at Red River, and the 2005 BRAC round further shifted the Red River mission while closing Lone Star altogether, affecting hundreds of jobs in four states.

By working with state, local and federal officials over the past 30 years, the former

Army property is now TexAmericas Center, home to about 47 companies and more than 1,400 workers.

ADC talked with TexAmericas Center Executive Director & CEO Scott Norton about how his community grew through the two BRAC rounds and his guidance for other communities that may face mission change down the road.

ADC: What has driven the success at TexAmericas over the years?

NORTON: Our staff has worked diligently day in and day out to drive our organization to where it is today with the full support of our board of directors, federal, state and local elected officials, our contractors, and our community that has rallied around our efforts.

Each time we make a request for information or support, the responses are swift and thorough, guiding us to a result that drives us forward for an existing tenant or business prospect or resolve any issue we are experiencing. Building those



TexAmericas Center completed construction in 2021 on a 150,000-square foot facility on spec. Within a year, a manufacturing company had purchased the structure. Photos courtesy of TexAmericas Center

complicated and detailed issues that require expertise to ensure the property can truly benefit the community and partnering with organizations like the DOD Office of Local Defense Community Collaboration (OLDCC) is beneficial.

Additionally, getting involved in the Association of Defense Communities to make connections with communities and individuals that have been through this process would be extremely beneficial. TexAmericas Center joined ADC early in our existence and worked closely with the Office of Economic Adjustment, the predecessor to OLDCC, to really jumpstart the redevelopment efforts on our over 12,000 acres of former military property.

ADC: Is there hope you can offer community leaders who may fear there is no life after a closure or realignment, whether it's a full base or a smaller number of facilities?

NORTON: Closure and realignment are not ideal for any community, but they do create opportunity. The community and its leaders need to decide if they want to make the most of this opportunity by pulling themselves up by the bootstraps and getting to work for their community, or if they want this to be an event that negatively impacts their community for decades to come.

The communities that have a path forward and work the plan as laid out following best practices, will have success over time but most likely not overnight. We worked hard getting through the first stages of our plan, and it took a decade of dedicating time and resources to make that happen, and our region is reaping the benefits of those efforts today.

It's worth it—especially on the hard days, it's worth it. As one of my mentors used to say, “Ya gotta wanna.” I have that saying on my desk so I can see it every day to keep moving our project forward. 📌

relationships through transparency and inclusion continues to benefit TexAmericas Center, our tenants, their employees the families of those employees and the economy throughout our region.

ADC: Without a BRAC round anytime soon, DOD is more likely to close just some portions of an installation, including in communities that have never gone through a redevelopment challenge. What is your guidance for them?

NORTON: Build a concise and executable plan for the community through public involvement and with the expertise of those that have been through the process before and have learned best practices of acquiring the land for the community and how to ensure its best use. There are

Norton, left, and Ross Alexander, president of Texas A&M University-Texarkana signed a memorandum of understanding in 2023 to provide reduced tuition for employees of TexAmericas Center and its tenants. Photo courtesy of TexAmericas Center





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U.S. Marines cheer for a teacher and her son during a back-to-school celebration at the Crossroads Elementary School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Virginia, Aug. 21, 2024. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. David Brandes

A BOLD PATH FORWARD: THE MILITARY AND ITS NEIGHBORS GROW TOGETHER

For generations, our military has found a home in America's defense communities. Guided by unwavering support, these unique places have provided the foundation for both missions and military families to thrive. ADC's roots go back to the first meeting of what was then called the National Association of Installation Developers, after decades of fluctuation in the size and number of military installations across the country after World War II and in the early Cold War Era.

In 2026, ADC will celebrate its 50th anniversary. It will commemorate the milestone by charting a bold path forward for America's defense communities. Its strategic blueprint aims to propel communities into a future where their mission is strengthened and sustained for years to come. It's a vision for supporting the military, their families and the communities they call home. It's about building a future where unity endures.

Here's a look at some of the key moments from ADC's nearly five decades of support.

BY RANDY FORD

Images from ADC archive

Hundreds of World War II-era bases are shuttered, affecting communities across the country. The DOD Office of Economic Adjustment (OEA) is established to help them.

1960-70s

DOD's need to continue downsizing its footprint faces resistance as Congress and local leaders try to stop their local bases from closing. To remove the politics, Congress creates the independent Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) commission, which recommends closing 17 major bases.

1980s

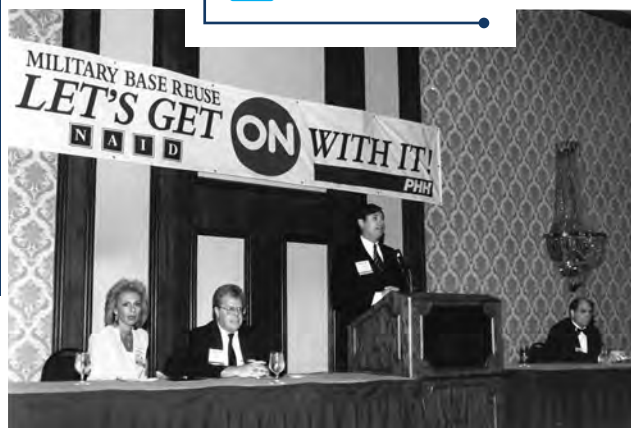
1976

The National Association of Installation Developers (NAID) is formed to bring together organizations that were working to identify new uses for former military property. NAID works with OEA to support communities affected by changing missions.



1990

The Defense Base Realignment and Closure Act of 1990 establishes three more rounds of closure and a structure for supporting communities after BRAC, including creating local redevelopment authorities to guide the redevelopment process and help communities recover from the impacts of BRAC.





Based on ADC's concept, Congress creates the Defense Community Infrastructure Program, which allows DOD to offer grants to local governments for infrastructure projects that directly support communities and installations. First funded in 2020 at \$50 million, the program doubles in size over the subsequent four years.



In its 50th year, ADC will celebrate its "We Are One" campaign, telling the stories of how military missions, communities, military families and civilian neighbors support shared successes.

2019

2026



Through three rounds of BRAC, nearly 100 major bases are closed across the U.S., impacting nearly 200,000 civilian jobs. NAID becomes the central connection point between DOD and communities affected by BRAC.

1991-1995

NAID organizes its first event focused on using partnerships to support DOD installations and missions. Monterey, California's model efforts to share services with its local base begin to take root, through the leadership of Rep. Sam Farr (D-Calif.).

2000

ADC's membership becomes comprised primarily of communities and state organizations tasked with supporting and sustaining local installations and missions.

2010s

1999

Sen. Mark Pryor (D-Ark.) champions landmark legislation enabling DOD to transfer surplus BRAC properties to communities at no cost for economic redevelopment purposes. It accelerates the transfer process and economic revitalization of impacted communities.



2005

The fifth and final BRAC round to date is the largest and most complex in scope and cost, affecting 218 bases and closing 25 major bases. With a cost of over \$35 billion, this round of BRAC focuses on transformation and leads to the relocation of over 100,000 jobs.

As communities and states ramp up sustained engagement in support of their installations, NAID rebrands as the Association of Defense Communities.



2013

With ADC's support, Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Rep. Farr spearhead the creation of a new congressional authority, Intergovernmental Support Agreements (IGSAs), to formalize collaborative efforts between installations and defense communities.

ADC convenes the first Installation Innovation Forum to focus on the emergence of community partnerships as a tool for supporting installations and their missions. It also launches the Defense Communities National Summit, a yearly convening of community, state and federal leaders in Washington, D.C.



2021

OEA is renamed the Office of Local Defense Community Cooperation.



Col. Todd E. Randolph, 316th Wing and installation commander, looks up toward the solar eclipse at Joint Base Andrews, Md. April 8, 2024. The solar eclipse peaked at 87% in the National Capital Region and lasted for approximately three and a half minutes. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Alex Broome



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BY KAREN HOLT
PRESIDENT, ADC

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE, WE ARE ‘ONE COMMUNITY’

For generations, our military has found a home in America’s defense communities. Guided by unwavering support, these places have provided a foundation for missions and military families to thrive. As global risks increasingly threaten our homeland, the resilience of these communities is more crucial than ever. Our national security depends on America’s defense communities.

After World War II, the military’s footprint expanded dramatically. What were once isolated outposts turned into bustling hubs as nearby towns developed and prospered alongside the growing bases. But with progress came challenges. The demands of the military changed, and many bases became obsolete, leading to their closure. The repercussions of these closures were profound, shaking the very foundations of the communities that had come to rely on the military presence.

In response to these seismic changes, the National Association of Installation Developers, now known as the Association of Defense Communities (ADC), was formed in 1976. This organization, alongside the Department of Defense and the Office of Economic Adjustment, worked tirelessly to help these communities recover and adapt. The Base Realignment and Closure process, which realigned or closed over 350 major installations, tested the resilience of these communities. Communities advocated for their bases, securing new investments and proving that their role went beyond mere proximity; they were essential partners in national defense.

Out of this challenging period, a new understanding of interdependence emerged. Military installations and their surrounding communities were no longer seen as separate entities. Instead, they became true partners. Through congressional authorities like intergovernmental support agreements and the Defense Community Infrastructure Program, the concept of the “defense community” was solidified. These communities were no longer passive observers; they became active participants in mission assurance and vital support systems for military families. The modern defense community was born.

In 2026, ADC will celebrate its 50th anniversary. We will commemorate this milestone by charting a bold path forward for America’s defense communities. This strategic blueprint aims to propel these communities into a future where their mission is strengthened and sustained for years to come. It’s a vision for supporting our military, their families and the communities they call home. It’s about building a future where unity endures.

In many ways, America’s defense communities represent the best of America. Our communities are examples of unity, resilience and partnership. We bridge the divide between military and civilian life, reminding us of our shared identity and purpose. As we celebrate ADC’s proud past and look to our future, we must remain committed to the goal of being “**One Community**” to protect America for generations to come. 🇺🇸

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