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New Family Support Group for MO National Guard

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*Submitted by
Dee Loflin, SMT Manager/Writer*

Cape Girardeau, Missouri – For the Family of a new Missouri National Guard recruit, the transition from civilian to Citizen-Soldier can be gratifying and difficult.

The road to becoming a Guardsman can take time with paperwork, entrance processing, basic and advanced individual training.

New recruits from across southeast Missouri serve in Company E of the Recruit Sustainment program in Cape Girardeau. Through the program, they learned basic Army skills and values and became more familiar with their role as a Soldier in the Missouri Army National Guard.

And while the primary responsibility lies with the new recruit, Families are affected too, the ones closest to the new recruit are who they turn to for support during all this.

“Your Soldiers are going to change, but you’re going to change too,” said Staff Sgt. Jeremy McGuire, Recruit Sustainment Program coordinator in Cape Girardeau. “You just have to be patient with each other, and learn and change together.”

One of the biggest and often hardest moments is when the new recruit leaves for basic and advanced training, which depending on their chosen military career can be between four to eight months. In a few careers, this can be longer.

For Families during this time, they can feel left behind, left out, disconnected or overwhelmed with how to get through the responsibilities of daily life without their Soldier, said Angel McGuire.

“There’s nothing wrong with feeling that way,” added Angel. “But you have to learn how to remain strong because it means the world to the Soldier to have someone behind them supporting and loving them every step of the way.”

Last fall, Angel and her husband realized that the recruit sustainment program had many Families learning and struggling with the transition and remaining strong for themselves and their Soldier.

“There are so many things going on during this time and people are going to have issues and they need someone to talk to,” said Angel.

Every unit in the Missouri National Guard has a Family Readiness Group composed of spouses, girlfriends, boyfriends, Family members, even community leaders and employers who come together to provide activities, support, outreach and information for Families and Soldiers alike. From tougher times during deployments to the monthly weekend training drills, the groups offer a wide-range of resources.

For McGuire, who deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in 2010 to 2011, and Angel the importance of a support group can be the pivotal point for someone to make it through any military career.

And there’s no more important moment for spouses than when a Soldier first enlists, said McGuire.

“Yes, your spouse enlisted and being married to you that means they enlisted you too,” he said. “You may not put the uniform on but you’re a big role in that too.”



In February, RSP hosted its first FRG meeting, inviting spouses, significant others and relatives.

They're goal is to make sure to be there for one another, said Angel.

"Behind every good Soldier is a good spouse, or fiancé, or girlfriend or boyfriend, or parent," she said.

During their first meeting along with reassuring one another they can overcome the difficulties, McGuire and Angel described what the Soldiers will be going through in the upcoming months, what basic training is like, what to expect after basic and advanced individual training when the Soldiers begin once-a-month weekend drills with their new units.

Even ideas such as writing letters to stay connected to their Soldiers while they're gone for months at a time during basic training.

"For me it means something more than just a text or an email," said McGuire.

"When they have mail call it's like Christmas."

What'll make Soldiers and their Families stronger is each other and letting them and the FRG know if they have any problems or issues, Angel told the attendees, encouraging them to call her any time even when their Soldiers are away during basic and advanced training.

"I don't care if it's just because you've had a bad day," said Angel, who's gotten calls in the middle of the night. "It doesn't bother me, if you need to talk, let's talk."

As the FRG grows she hopes what the group can provide is a way to make the transition from civilian Family to Citizen-Soldier Family smoother, provide contacts and information on what to do in an emergency why your Soldier is gone, and how to connect to the Soldiers' new unit Families.

"I think this is a really good idea," said Sarah Davidson, of Jackson, who's husband Cody is currently serving with the RSP. "When your Family gets tired of hearing about what is bothering you, it is nice to get to talk to someone else about it."

Angel and McGuire hope in the upcoming months as more spouses and Families participate they can pass along each others experiences.

"Your experiences as your Soldier is getting back from basic training can be passed onto the brand new recruits' Families who just enlisted last week." McGuire told the ERG.

Above all, Angel hopes the group gives a place for Families to talk and find support.

"I know this isn't going to be as easy for some as it is others," she said. "Hopefully we can just make this a lot smoother for everyone and be here for each other."

For more information about the Missouri National Guard, please visit www.moguard.com and our social media sites: www.facebook.com/Missouri.National.Guard; www.twitter.com/Missouri_NG; www.youtube.com/MoNationalGuard; www.myspace.com/missouri_ng; www.flickr.com/photos/missouriguard; www.moguard.com/blog; www.pinterest.com/monationalguard/

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