IN THE NEWS

Courtesy Photo

Making the grade

Gen. Charles "Tony" Robertson Jr., commander of U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command, and AMC Command Chief Master Sgt. Kenneth Van Holbeck tacked staff sergeant stripes on Adam Sinclair, 437th Aerial Port Squadron air transporter, Nov. 30 at Prince Sultan AB, Saudi Arabia. Robertson and Van Holbeck also tacked stripes on Staff Sgt. David Burdick and Master Sgt. Victor Yancey, and reenlisted Senior Airman Jonathan Ward. The air transporters are deployed along with nine others from the 437 APS for a 90-day Aerospace Expeditionary Force rotation. They are scheduled to return Dec. 19.

Budget adds big TRICARE benefits for active duty

Active-duty members and their families should look for major new benefits coming soon in DOD's TRICARE managed healthcare plan, a senior program official said.

Col. Frank Cumberland, TRICARE Management Activity director of communications and customer service, said the most publicized TRICARE change in the defense budget signed Oct. 30 has been the opening up of benefits to Medicare-eligible retirees age 65 and older.

The coming wave of change, however, won't overlook active-duty members and families, he added.

Some of the benefits being added to TRICARE within the next year include:

- Active duty family members will no longer have to make co-payments for care from a civilian provider after Apr. 30
- Family members of active-duty troops in remote locations become eligible for the TRICARE Prime Remote program Oct. 1
- DOD will have a five-year period to phase in making chiropractic care available to active duty troops

TRICARE and health affairs officials are still working out the details on these changes and will announce them when plans are complete, Cumberland said.

TRICARE managers are also working to increase access to school physicals and eliminate the need for some nonavailability statements and some referrals for specialty care. Some of these issues may not come to pass before a new TRICARE contract is awarded, perhaps in 2003 or 2004, program officials advised.

Dr. H. James Sears, executive director of the TRICARE Management Activity, called the changes outlined in this year's budget legislation, "the biggest platter of benefit changes" since the mid-1960s. TRICARE, he said, is adding benefits and continues to lower beneficiaries' out-of-pocket costs and, in the process, taking the irritants out of the TRICARE program and improving accessibility."

Sears added that people generally evaluate their healthcare system based on three factors:

- The quality of care
- The range of benefits
- The cost

"When you look at TRICARE, those are all slam dunks," Sears said.

For more information, visit the TRICARE Web site at www.tricare.osd.mil. ***(AFPS)***

CGOs

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son, and you will have left your mark on the Air Force," he added.

"I think mentoring is making sure that people have the right values, that they understand the core values of the Air Force," Williams said. "That they understand why we do what we do and why we serve, and that we put things in perspective for people based on our experience and our judgment that we've gotten by being around just a little bit longer."

He said leading and mentoring are similar. "Make sure you understand what your people are doing for you, and that they have the resources to do their jobs. But what they really need is that last piece we talked about in mentorship.

"That's really the leader's job and the mentor's job: to make sure that people understand philosophically what it is we in the U.S. Air Force are trying to do, and what the road is we want to take to get there," he added, saying this understanding enables people to make better decisions on their own. "And then we give them all the resources and stand back, and get out of the way. You'd be surprised how easy this leadership thing is when you do that."

He said sometimes people will come to the CGOs with questions about Air Force programs and policies, and it is their responsibility to stay informed. "As a mentor, it's up to you to make sure you understand all those things that people will come to you for guidance on, and that you stay up on things that apply to those people who work for you."

The CGOC hosted the luncheon as part of a growing professional development program. "We had Chief Hampton, 437 AW command chief master sergeant, at our last meeting; and we plan to have other base leaders at future meetings," said 1st Lt. Randy Ackerman, CGOC president and 437th Aircraft Generation Squadron "Shark" Flight assistant flight commander.

CGOC meetings are held the third Wednesday of each month at 11:30 in the Charleston Club. Attendees usually go through the food line and eat together at the meeting, and the business portion of the meeting commences at 11:45.

"When we found out General Williams was coming, we asked what the chances were we could get him to come and talk with the CGOC," Ackerman said.

"I thought everybody learned from him, and he put people at ease," said Ackerman. "His presence was, 'tell me how it really is.'"

To CGOs who've never been to a CGOC meeting, Ackerman said, "Give CGOC a chance. Come once, and see if you like it. We're doing a lot of great things, and getting out in the community. CGOC is a great way to learn who's on base and have fun with your professional peers."

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a priority for the last three years," said Harnage. "We've been successful in moving the pay up a half a percent each year. In 2001, we will have moved pay up a full percentage point."

He added that pay has become a big priority because the law that governs white-collar pay has never been followed. "We want to close the pay gap between the private and government sectors," he said. "Over the years, the gap has grown when it was supposed to close. Next year, we plan to push for blue-collar pay improvements. The wage-grade pay structure is 30 years old now, and it's based on an antiquated system."

AFGE also supports improving the Federal Employee Health Benefit Program--the civilian health care program.

"The federal workforce is the federal government's largest group of taxpayers in the United States," said Harnage. "We are concerned about the cost of government as much as everyone else is. But there is absolutely no reason for the federal government to be paying the high premiums."

AFGE's other priority will be on the contracting out issue in the form of outsourcing and privatization, which often eliminates civilian jobs.

"All we are trying to do there is to bring some common sense to privatization," Harnage said. "All we're asking for is that we want to know how many contracts are out there, what are the projected savings, what were the actual savings, if any; and we're insisting that competition can be good both ways. Let's compete with the contractor and see if we can do it cheaper in house."

Photo by Lt. Col. Ed Memi

Bobby Harnage, national president of the American Federation of Government Employees, visited Charleston AFB Nov. 28-29 to bid farewell to Richard Egal, AFGE Local 1869 president. Harnage praised the base for a strong labor-management partnership.