

Retiree representative visits base, hears concerns

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437 AW Public Affairs

Retired Chief Master Sgt. Greg O'Donoghue of the USAF Retiree Council visited Charleston AFB last week to honor volunteers and hear retiree concerns.

O'Donoghue represents retirees in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Virginia on the council, which annually meets with the Air Force Chief of Staff. While attending the CAFB Retiree Activities Office annual Christmas party, he spoke with retirees on topics ranging from Tricare to Space Available flights.

"My purpose to visit here is to meet with the Retiree Activities Office and see what they're doing and how they're doing," O'Donoghue explained. "I met with (wing vice commander) Col. Norris and we discussed how the base is supporting the retirees and they themselves are volunteering and supporting the base."

Currently, more than 80 retirees volunteer on base, supporting such agencies as the medical group and security forces squadron. "It's just super," O'Donoghue commented. "These volunteers have a lot of knowledge. They have the maturity and they're able to serve continually. Although they're retired, they're still serving."

The USAF Retiree Council is made of representatives from 14 geographic areas. Headquartered at Randolph AFB, Texas, it's chaired by retired Lt. Gen. Everett Pratt and retired Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Eric Benken. The council listens to and acts upon the comments and concerns of Air Force retirees (see related story). The council meets annually with the Air Force chief of staff, or vice chief of staff, as was the case this year. Also attending the conference are various Air Force leaders, such as the Air Force Surgeon General and commander of Air Force Services. They brief area representatives on retiree-related issues.

O'Donoghue visits active duty bases in his area and gets feedback from retirees on perceived problems. One current hot topic is Tricare, he said.

"Tricare is probably the biggest issue we have," O'Donoghue said. "The over-65 retiree sometimes feels left out and angry because of perceived promises made. Those under 65 feel they have free care coming to them, in some cases. But under Tricare, there is a cost involved."

Other big issues include Space Available flight priorities and Honor Guard availability for deceased members. While

About the Air Force Retiree Council

The Air Force Retiree Council was established in 1972 with the first meeting in 1973 chaired by the late retired Brigadier General Roy Casbeer, Co-chairmen are retired Lt. Gen. Everett H. Pratt, Jr., and former Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Eric W. Benken.

The Council co-chairmen are the Chief of Staff's liaison with the retiree community and work directly for the Chief. They chair the Air Force Retiree Council, which meets annually at the Air Force Personnel Center to discuss retiree issues. Upon conclusion of the meeting, they report the Council's findings directly to the Chief.

The Council is comprised of the Co-chairmen, 13 members who represent geographic areas within the continental United States, and one representative each from the Pacific and European areas. Additionally, there are two at large positions. There are 114 Retiree Activities Offices and each Council member oversees the retiree activities programs within his/her respective area of responsibility. The Co-chairmen play an active role in the identification and selection of Council members.

At the invitation of local commanders and Retiree Activities Office directors, the Co-chairmen visit Air Force installations to speak about issues concerning retirees and their dependents. They maintain contact with many military associations (The Retired Officer Association, Air Force Association, Air Force Sergeants Association, etc) and obtain their views on retiree matters. They also meet with retiree council co-chairmen from the other services to discuss issues that are common to all military retirees.

the number of Honor Guard units is decreasing, the retiree force continues to age and die at an increased rate, O'Donoghue explained. "The number of Honor Guards available is less and the number of funerals seem to be getting more.

"From the information I'm getting, Charleston is doing an excellent job in that area, for the administration of the Honor Guard," he said. "(Honor Guard) is very important

to the survivors."

The support given to the Retiree Activities Office by the wing is "excellent," according to O'Donoghue. "Charleston is a beautiful base and well maintained. I'm impressed with the spaciousness of the Retiree Activities Office. Somebody's taking good care of those folks."

Another issue is keeping retirees apprised on legislative issues and the electoral process, O'Donoghue said. Retirees can help themselves in this area by being involved in professional organizations such as the Air Force Association, Air Force Sergeants Association, the Retired Officer Association and Retired Enlisted Association.

"These professional organizations keep the retirees aware of what's happening before the vote's taken, therefore giving them the opportunity to input their desires later on when it's time to vote."

Traditionally, voter turnout has been low in the military, O'Donoghue said. But once members become knowledgeable about what's happening, they become more involved in the voting process.

"If you've spent your whole life defending the country, you need to have an input," he commented. "In today's Congress, only approximately 20 percent of the members have had military experience. They make the decisions on taxes, base closures, pay raises...80 percent of them have no military experience. They can't take our feelings and experience into consideration without our input."

In closing, O'Donoghue said he's impressed with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Michael Ryan's commitment to the retirees. Previously, the USAF Retiree Council has been chaired by only one person. Also, Pratt is the highest ranking member to serve as a chairman of the organization.

"That's very top-level involvement," he said. "Apparently, Chief Benken and Lt. Gen. Pratt have an open door policy. That makes a big difference."

Approximately 50 retirees attended last week's event and O'Donoghue spoke to each one of them, according to retired Chief Master Sgt. Henry Scott of the base Retiree Activities Office.

"I thought it was outstanding," Scott said. "He was impressed with our office and our ability to communicate with retirees. He talked to every retiree there to get input. He was there to learn what he could about their issues as senior retirees. He was also impressed that senior wing leadership came out to rub elbows. Everyone left with a good feeling."

Clinton

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scenario," said Col. Glenn Mackey, deputy commander of the 437 OG and mission commander for the president's trip.

"Personnel from U.S. Air Forces in Europe worked up to the last minute to ensure there was an adequate precision approach capability available to the Pristina airport and that there was adequate ground support in place to accommodate inclement weather or difficult ramp conditions," he said.

The airfield at Pristina was questionable, which was the reason Charleston and the C-17 were picked. "During the war, the airfield took some hits and there was concern with threats in the local area, which is why the C-17 with its defensive systems and armor was the obvious choice," said Cerrow, a standardization and evaluation pilot, who flew one of the backup aircraft.

In the early planning, there was concern that not all 9,000 feet of the runway would be available and that the C-17 shortfield landing capabilities might have to be used.

"That never came about as we did a normal landing, but it was only a week

before there was some question whether de-icing equipment and an instrument approach system would be available in time," Cerrow said.

"From the customer's perspective, the mission was nearly flawless. Both the Presidential Pilots Office liaison and the Chief of the Presidential Protection Division (Secret Service) were highly complimentary of the crews and the mission execution, saying things went much better than they ever hoped for," Mackey said. "And despite the heightened security and threat awareness of the region, the president had enough confidence in the aircraft and crew that he nodded off during departure from Kosovo. Before he left the aircraft at Aviano, he thanked the crew for another outstanding job by Team Charleston."

"The president and Chelsea were both extremely complimentary. During both flights, Chelsea spent her time in the seat behind the copilot for almost the entire period. She talked with the crew about everything from being at Stanford to being the President's daughter. Everyone on my crew, (including me) was impressed with her again, very intelligent, very easy to talk

to, very down to earth," said Cianciolo. "This was my fourth opportunity to fly the president and first family and probably the most challenging from a pre-mission planning perspective."

Cianciolo said there was lots of coordination to ensure the flight was conducted safely into and out of the theater and to ensure that operational risks were minimized.

"What was unusual about this trip was that it was so ordinary, despite the threats going in. The reason why everything was so ordinary was that we've done this before and have refined the processes so well that there was nothing that we were unprepared for," said 15 AS chief loadmaster Senior Master Sgt. Bill Couture, one of two loadmasters on the President's aircraft and the overall coordinator for getting the passengers on and off-board safely.



courtesy photo

President Clinton shook hands and posed with troops when he made an early Thanksgiving to visit with deployed soldiers at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. Three Charleston based-C-17s and aircrews flew the president and his staff into Kosovo and Italy.

Not only are the aircrews and maintainers impressed with the C-17, but so was the president. Prior to landing at Pristina, as noted by Mackey, the president turned to his daughter and commented on the assault landing of the C-17 and said, "This is awesome. This thing can stop on a dime!"