



# News Release

## UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

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### **FAMILY SUPPORT HELPS EASE PAIN OF DEPLOYMENT**

**CHARLESTON AIR FORCE BASE, S.C.** – President George W. Bush told military forces to “get ready,” and one of the best tools to help military members get ready to support their nation is the Family Support Center.

The center offers a wide variety of programs for deployed Charleston AFB personnel and their families, according to Tech. Sgt. Ken Gilmore, family readiness NCO.

These programs are presented to deploying personnel, along with a packet of information, which includes checklists and reading material to help prepare both the member and family for the upcoming deployment, during a predeployment briefing or on the deployment line.

“Between the two, we hit pretty much everybody,” Gilmore said.

Family readiness programs include a variety of services, from a video phone to free child care.

The video telephone allows family members to see each other while they speak. Located in a special room at the FSC, the phone is available by appointment. Not all deployed locations have video telephones, according to Gilmore, and Saudi Arabia is one of those, but there are various other locations where the service is available.

Another program allows members to call each other without blowing a tight budget. Morale calls allow a family member to call loved ones from the comfort of home, free of charge.

According to Gilmore, one 15-minute telephone call per week is authorized. Family members using the program call the base operator and are connected DSN to the deployed member.

Closely related to the morale calls are free calling cards. According to Gilmore, the Air Force Aid Society donates free calling cards worth \$20 for personnel who are deployed or TDY. The cards are not available for members on remote assignments. Gilmore said the center also gives out two other free cards, for 30 minutes and 45 minutes worth of phone calls. These cards were purchased with additional funds the FSC received from Air Mobility Command.

Another way family members can keep in touch through family readiness programs is e-mail. Family members receive their own private e-mail address and may use the computers to keep in touch with the deployed member.

For deployed members with children, the FSC offers "Operation R.E.A.D" or Reading Enjoyed Although Deployed. The program allows members to videotape themselves reading books at the FSC before their deployment. The library provides the books and the FSC provides the videotape. While the member is deployed, the FSC mails the books and tapes to the family. The program requires an appointment.

While seeing a loved one and hearing a familiar voice does wonders for a family's morale, it sometimes isn't enough to prevent the stress and worries those left at home experience. Several family readiness programs address this.

"Sip-n-Chat" is a support group for spouses of deployed members. The group meets on a monthly basis, and children are welcome.

"About eight months out of the year we go on trips," said Gilmore. They try to go places where kids will have fun too, he said.

The group is closely related to SpouseLINC, a program tailored to each unit's needs. SpouseLINCs are a focal point for information and support to families in each unit.

Gilmore said the FSC keeps a list of spouses of deployed military members.

“Tuesday (Sept. 11) we called all the spouses of deployed members,” Gilmore said. “When something like that happens, it can be frightening. We called them to see if they had any concerns, and many called back and said they didn’t have any concerns, but they were just glad to hear from us.”

Also available at the FSC is the “Give Parents a Break” program, which provides free childcare for five hours one Saturday a month while the military member is deployed.

Another program is “Car Care Because We Care,” which provides a free oil change from the Auto Skills Center and a vehicle safety inspection while the member is deployed.

Flora Hoss-Mason, FSC director, said Air Force Aid deserves a lot of credit for the programs available at the FSC.

“Their grant programs are what allow us to do so much for free,” Hoss-Mason said.

In addition to the family readiness programs, the FSC offers various electronic equipment and software programs to families of deployed members.

“We have a computer set up with a scanner and create-a-card software,” said Gilmore. “We loan out emergency travel kits for families going on the road. We loan digital cameras and video cameras so families can record special events, like birthdays.”

Regina Lasley, wife of Master Sgt. Thomas Lasley, 437<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Generation Squadron, said she’s glad the center’s programs are available. Her husband is currently deployed to Saudi Arabia.

“I think it’s great they do the phone call thing,” Lasley said. “I’m sure calling Saudi Arabia costs an arm and a leg. I just wish I could call more often and without a restriction on what time of day. I’m thankful it’s here.”

Lasely attended her first “Sip-n-Chat” Monday.

Another “Sip-n-Chat” attendee said she’s used several of the family readiness programs.

“I’ve used the car care, the telephone and calling cards,” said Barbara Haar, wife of Staff Sgt. Robert Haar, 437 AGS flying crew chief. “The calling cards are a lot better because it gives

both him a chance and me a chance to call. Plus, if I'm not available at home, he can call me on my cell phone."

Both Gilmore and Hoss-Mason said the key to preparing for deployment is not waiting until the last minute to get everything in order.

Deployments can be tough for everyone involved, but with a little help from the FSC, they don't have to be impossible.

**(For more information, contact Master Sgt. Dan Murphy at 963-5582 or Staff Sgt. Pamela Smith at 963-5589)**