

Op Santa gives area children holiday cheer

By Col. Kevin Brown
GARRISON COMMANDER

For more than 40 years, the Fort Riley community, along with the help of Santa Claus, has been providing gifts for children in the area to help brighten their holiday season. This year Operation Santa's gift-giving season will kick off at 1 p.m. Nov. 12 at Building 261 on Main Post. Santa Claus will make a special early appearance to assist with the ribbon cutting and officially open Operation Santa headquarters.

Operation Santa Claus is a local initiative put together to help provide toys for children in Families from Fort Riley Junction City, Manhattan and throughout the Central Flint Hills Region who might not otherwise have gifts for the holidays. Last year, approximately 3,600 children received gifts through this charitable effort.

After the official kick off, Operation Santa's volunteer elves will be recruiting help, wrapping gifts, collecting new unwrapped toys from drop boxes around the community and heading out on toy-buying sprees. Last year, Operation Santa raised more than \$29,000 and collected and purchased more than 5,500 toys to help supplement the season.

Besides those anonymous volunteers who left presents in drop boxes last year, almost 250 volunteers gave more than 830 hours fulfilling Operation Santa's mission. Sixteen of those volunteered



Col. Brown



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Pfc. Robert O'Byrne and Pvt. Sean Helmick, 1st Repl. Co., help set up Operation Santa headquarters, Building 261, on Main Post for its opening at 1 p.m. Nov. 12.

multiple times and one elf gave 10 hours of time to the program. This truly is an example of the Army taking care of its own.

This year, drop boxes for toys will be located at various points throughout Junction City, Manhattan and Fort Riley. We ask that toys be unwrapped and age-appropriate. Operation Santa collects toys for children of all ages, so while you're out shopping, remember the older children as well as the toddlers. Those who would like to volunteer to gather toys or share their gift-wrapping skills, can call Sgt. Maj. Randy Bailey, Op Santa noncommissioned officer in charge, at 785-239-6944.

If you, or someone you know, could use help this holiday season, contact your unit first sergeant for a request

form. Requests should include the Family's name, ages of children and any special needs and may be faxed to 785-239-2797. Operation Santa gift request forms are being distributed this week to all unit first sergeants on post. Requests are due by Dec. 5 in order for all orders to be fulfilled and delivered before Christmas. Any gifts left over after requests are filled are donated to organizations within the Central Flint Hills Region.

One change to this year's program is parents will have the opportunity to come to Op Santa headquarters and pick out toys and stocking stuffers for their children. In years past, volunteers would match gifts with request forms and deliver the toys wrapped for the holiday. Parents may pick up toys from 7 to 9 p.m. Dec. 1-3 and from 2 to 5

p.m. Dec. 5 and 6. After submitting a request form, Families should call Op Santa's headquarters to reserve a shopping time. The headquarters will be closed to others during this time to allow our Families the privacy to shop. If parents would rather have the elves pick out gifts, Operation Santa elves will call the unit once the wrapped presents are available for pick up.

Whether it is by volunteering or donating a gift, let's all do our part to support our Families who may be having tough times. By each giving a little, we can accomplish a lot this holiday season.

If you would like to comment on this article or suggest a topic for Community Corner, e-mail riley.post.newspaper@comus.army.mil

JCHS freshmen visit IACH, community for job ideas

By Shandi Dix
1ST INF. DIV. POST

"I wanted to be just like 'Hot Lips' Houlihan (Maj. Margaret 'Hot Lips' Houlihan) on M*A*S*H," said Maj. Amber Pocrnich, RNC, chief for education and professional development.

Pocrnich is an obstetrics and gynecology nurse at Irwin Army Community Hospital.

The Junction City High School Freshman Success Academy visited IACH Oct. 20 as part of the annual Discovery Days event, where they met Pocrnich.

"Discovery Days is an opportunity for our students to visit various career opportunities throughout the community so they are able to see what job skills are necessary for the workforce today," said Kate Erickson, Freshman Success Academy leader.

Discovery Days were held Oct. 20, 22, 27 and 29.

Pocrnich knew from an early age that she wanted to be a nurse.

"Ever since I was 3 (years old) I wanted to be an Army nurse," Pocrnich said. "That's what I wanted to be, and I told my mom and dad and they said, 'No, you're not going into the Army. Forget it.' So they sent me off to school, and I signed an ROTC scholarship."

Pocrnich used the ROTC program as her way into the Army. She told the students of other ways to enter into a military medical career which include taking courses, attending West Point or being a civilian doctor and going to a medical recruiter to become commissioned.

"I got commissioned as a second lieutenant the same day I graduated with a nursing degree," Pocrnich said. "I came in that way."

Others have helped Pocrnich make de-

isions throughout her career.

"When I started my career I wanted to be the hoosh Army nurse and take care of Soldiers, and I was going to be an orthopedic nurse or an (operating room) nurse," she said. "That's what I wanted to be."

She never planned to take care of infants.

When she arrived at her first duty station, Fort Bragg, N.C., the colonel told Pocrnich that she was going to work in the nursery. She was hesitant and first and told the colonel, "Maybe you didn't get my request, but I didn't want to work in the nursery."

The colonel told her that she'd soon learn about the needs of the Army so Pocrnich took her orders and fell in love. At the six-month mark the colonel asked Pocrnich if she wanted to move, and she told the colonel that she wanted to move to the neonatal intensive care unit.

When the Army made the decision to let the civilian workforce care for pediatrics Pocrnich decided to make a career change.

"So I decided 'You know what, I'll go to the OB course and take care of mommas, and I'll still get to take care of my babies,'" she said. "That's how I ended up going to the OB course. Thirteen years later, I love it."

Pocrnich has taken on five assignments including Fort Bragg, Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, Fort Wainwright, Alaska, Fort Sill, Okla., and now Fort Riley along with a deployment to Iraq.

While in Iraq, Pocrnich was part of a research team that attended every trauma in the Emergency Room to collect data points as part of 71 total studies to see injuries that would not be seen unless in a that way.

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