

## Taking Care of Family Emphasized During St. Louis Navy Week

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ST. LOUIS (NNS) -- Many methods to support the families of U.S. Navy personnel was brought to light during St. Louis Navy Week, April 20-26, including online social networking of Navy moms, spouses and family members.

Vice Adm. David Venlet, commander, Naval Air Systems Command, spoke about "Taking Care of the Navy Family" at a dinner for Navy families in Belleville, Ill., near metro St. Louis. The dinner was just one of the events during a week of festivities designed to increase awareness of the Navy's presence in the St. Louis and Missouri/Illinois area. St. Louis is one of 21 cities chosen to host a Navy Week in the United States this year.

"If you want to know why I think America's future is brighter," said Venlet, addressing family members of Sailors, "it's because people like you continue to raise a generation that will volunteer to serve."

Venlet discussed several family support programs the Navy has in place, such as the ombudsman program, family readiness groups, the Navy and Marine Corps Relief Society, and Fleet and Family Support Centers. The occasion included two groups of volunteers, Navy for Moms.com and the Military Spouse Corporate Career Network (MSCCN).

Both organizations are headed by women who are passionate about the Navy, and both utilize social networking via the Internet as a principal means of communication.

Michele Cowell, of Belleville, organized the Navy family dinner and is a promoter for the Navy for Moms Web site. She is a Navy mom herself. Her son, Michael, serves on a guided missile cruiser in the western Pacific. She saw the great potential for the Navy for Moms network as a means of encouragement, education and information sharing.

"I joined Navy for Moms last year," said Cowell. "I used it to help promote the activities of St. Louis Navy Week, but it is a fantastic tool for families, potential Sailors, ombudsmen, recruiters and anyone who has a link to a Navy Sailor."

Cowell said the site helps such people seek and find each other in groups of like interest and demographics.

Deb Kloeppe, of Lake St. Louis, Mo., is president of MSCCN. No stranger to Sailors and their families, Kloeppe is wife of retired Rear Adm. Daniel Kloeppe, who in 2001 served as commander, Naval Training Command, Great Lakes. MSCCN provides employment referrals and job placement services for military spouses, war wounded and caregivers of war wounded.

Kloeppe, who gave a presentation honoring Navy families at the dinner, also sees the potential and benefit of networking with families for encouragement and information sharing. She wants to share the stories of Sailors and their families with those who can be encouraged by them.

Web-based networks such as Facebook and Twitter are other avenues that Navy families and communities are using, and the Navy is taking notice. Just as recruitment initiatives are underway to work with younger Sailors to determine the most popular and effective ways to reach their peers, Navy commands are integrating such tools such as blogs, wikis, instant messaging, viral video and podcasts as resources for Navy families.

"Without the talent of America's young men and women that you turn over to our care, the Navy would cease to exist," said Venlet, summing up the critical nature of family support for Sailors.

Navy Weeks, each coordinated by the Navy Office of Community Outreach, are designed to educate Americans on the importance of naval service, understand the investment they make in their Navy and to increase awareness in cities which might not otherwise see the Navy at work on a regular basis.

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