

TOTAL FITNESS

Balancing physical,
social, spiritual and
mental wellness
page 14

From the Top

By Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr.
Commander, Air Force Reserve Command



Chief's View

By Chief Master Sgt. Dwight Badgett
Command Chief Master Sergeant,
Air Force Reserve Command

Build resilience by improving physical, social, spiritual and mental fitness

Within Air Force Reserve Command, we have a philosophy that the best way to handle a crisis is to prevent it from ever happening in the first place. That's why our outstanding maintenance specialists spend countless hours ensuring our aircraft are always fit to fly. Our aircrews are trained to handle all kinds of in-flight emergencies, but in our business, an ounce of prevention is worth significantly more than a pound of cure.

This way of thinking applies to our people as well as our aircraft. Airmen and their families face tremendous challenges, and we will always be there to offer our care and support during difficult times. My focus is on making sure you are as prepared, in advance, as you can possibly be to anticipate and cope with any adversity or crisis that might come your way.

You heard about resilience at our recent Wingman Day events. To build on our Airmen's ability to keep moving forward in their lives after experiencing significant stress or a highly traumatic event, Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz recently launched the Comprehensive Airman Fitness initiative. The purpose of this ini-

tiative is to enhance and sustain a culture of resilience by fostering mental, physical, social and spiritual health.

In this issue of *Citizen Airman*, we take a look at each of these four aspects of comprehensive fitness, and command experts offer some practical advice for improving your mental, physical, social and spiritual well-being.

Most of our Citizen Airmen have shown that they can handle whatever life throws at them; but for too many of our people, a traumatic life event or series of events leads to excessive alcohol or drug use, depression, physical abuse, divorce or even suicide.

While we always stand ready to help any member of the AFRC team cope with a traumatic event or deal with life's challenges, we know that the best time to deal with these situations is before they occur.

Be proactive. Expect the unexpected, and work on making yourself more resilient. Take a close look at the series of articles that begins on Page 14. I'm sure you will find something you can use to help you on your path to achieving comprehensive fitness and being better prepared for life's traumatic events. ★

Practice to make wingman concept a way of life, not just a slogan

My commentary in the October 2010 issue of *Citizen Airman* focused on Airman resiliency. And since we continue to face issues that increase the stress we all feel, it is time re-visit this topic.

The stress of managing your life as an Air Force Reservist, combined with today's challenges of a weaker economy and normal day-to-day activities, can cause some of us to consider doing things we might not normally do. These stressors can drive normally healthy people to increase risky behavior that sometimes leads to life-threatening situations.

This issue of *Citizen Airman* provides some great information on how to cope with stress, no matter what the source, and I recommend that you read and accept the help that is offered.

No one is immune to the pressures that come with being a Citizen Airman. However, we have something that the average American does not have to help us cope with these pressures. We

have our Air Force family to provide assistance when needed.

Because of our wingman program and the increased emphasis on watching out for each other, more Airmen are asking for help. And that is exactly the right thing to do. You have more than 71,000 teammates in our command and 500,000 total force partners who can relate to what you might be going through. We all have to build our resiliency so that we can cope with this increased stress. When necessary, we need to ask for help from our teammates.

When I visit our units or write in this publication, I continually tell you that you are a valuable member of the Air Force team, and we need you to be physically, mentally, spiritually and socially healthy and prepared to do our nation's business. We must make the wingman concept a way of life, not just a slogan.

So watch out for each other and practice resiliency every day. It will make you stronger, healthier and happier. ★

Airman Citizen

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On the front cover: While staying in good physical shape is an important part of being fit, it's not the only part. Based on years of study, Air Force officials believe there are four components to comprehensive fitness: physical, mental, social and spiritual. The Air Force and Air Force Reserve Command are committed to developing a culture of resilience among Airmen by promoting strong mental, physical, social and spiritual fitness. For a closer look at how AFRC is trying to accomplish this goal, see the series of stories beginning on Page 14.

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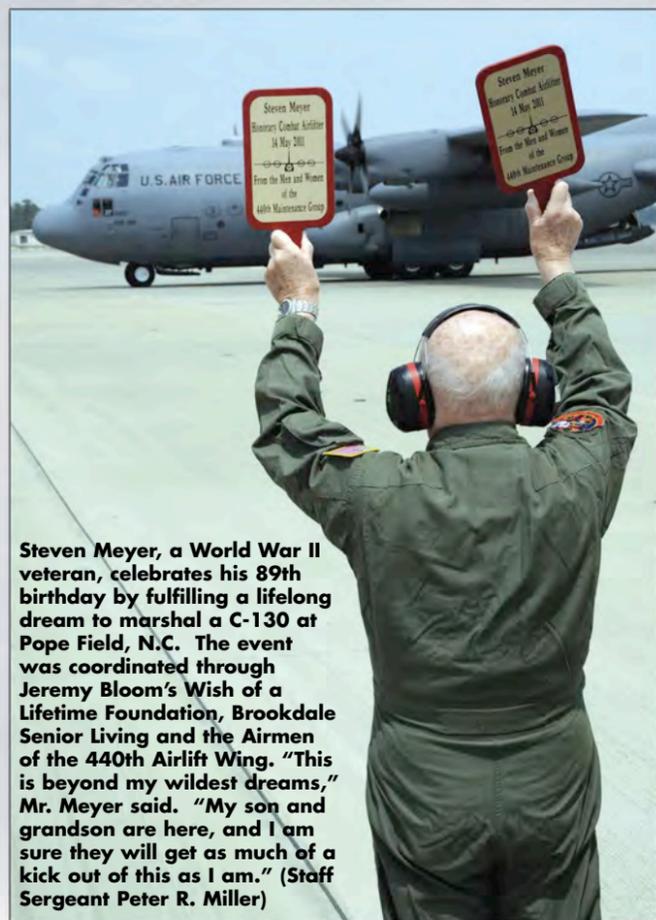
Remembrance

Staff Sgt. Andrew Caya, 914th Airlift Wing, Niagara Falls International Airport Air Reserve Station, N.Y., places an American flag on a grave during a Memorial Day ceremony at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Buffalo. During the morning, thousands of flags were placed next to the graves of those men and women who died while serving in the United States military. (Staff Sgt. Joseph McKee)





Tech. Sgt. Marcus Gandy, a weapons loader with the 917th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, tells a group of Boy Scouts from Troop 391 in Hawkins, Texas, about the 30mm Gatling gun used on an A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft during the 2011 Defenders of Liberty Air Show at Barksdale Air Force Base, La. (Tech. Sgt. Jeff Walston)



Steven Meyer, a World War II veteran, celebrates his 89th birthday by fulfilling a lifelong dream to marshal a C-130 at Pope Field, N.C. The event was coordinated through Jeremy Bloom's Wish of a Lifetime Foundation, Brookdale Senior Living and the Airmen of the 440th Airlift Wing. "This is beyond my wildest dreams," Mr. Meyer said. "My son and grandson are here, and I am sure they will get as much of a kick out of this as I am." (Staff Sergeant Peter R. Miller)



An Air Force Reserve C-40C aircraft from the 932nd Airlift Wing, Scott Air Force Base, Ill., sits on the transient airport ramp in Madison, Wis., as fireworks light up the sky two miles away during Rhythm & Booms 2011. Rhythm & Booms, which features the largest fireworks display in the Midwest, is a day-long celebration of American independence and patriotism. This year's event drew more than 230,000 spectators and included an F-16 formation flyover at dusk, Wisconsin Army National Guard demonstrations, and day and night-time jumps by the Army's Golden Knights parachute team. (Joe Oliva)

Children, parents and volunteers enjoy a shallow-water dolphin encounter as part of a Yellow Ribbon Program event at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii. Approximately 25 family members of deployed 48th Aerial Port Squadron Airmen attended the event. (Staff Sgt. Erin Smith)



Flying a KC-135 Stratotanker borrowed from McConnell Air Force Base, Kan., a crew from the 916th Air Refueling Wing, Seymour Johnson AFB, N.C., refuels an F-35 Lightning II, the Air Force's newest joint strike fighter. The 916th was the first wing in Air Force Reserve Command or Air Mobility Command to refuel the F-35.

Round the Reserve

A brief look at what's happening throughout Air Force Reserve Command

New Intel Squadron Stands Up at Langley

A new Air Force Reserve Command intelligence unit was activated June 7 at Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va.

The 718th Intelligence Squadron reports to the 940th Operations Group at Beale Air Force Base, Calif. The squadron is authorized nine officers and 79 enlisted Airmen.

The Reservists integrate with the regu-

lar Air Force's 497th Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance Group in support of Distributed Ground Station-2 at Langley. DGS-2 is a major component of the Air Force Distributed Common Ground System. Through Total Force Integration, the 718th IS Reservists will work alongside active-duty and Air National Guard Airmen at the DGS-2.

"The 718th will provide continuity and long-term experience to the DCGS mis-

sion, providing timely, relevant ISR support to war fighters at every level of combat," said Col. Jon M. Ellis, 940th OG commander. "In short, it will deliver the right support to the right war fighter at the right time."

The Air Force's DCGS is the service's premier globally networked intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance weapon system. The DCGS produces, exploits and disseminates intelligence information col-

'Someday' becomes reality for Ironman competitor

By Senior Airman Melissa Harvey

For a lot of people, "someday" is a word they say when they want to do something or make a change in their lives in the future, but they have no real plans of achieving their goal.

For some, "someday" becomes reality.

Staff Sgt. David D. Staffeld, 301st Aircraft Maintenance Squadron avionics specialist, watched Ironman World Championships for years and thought he would "someday" like to compete.

"I have always considered the people who complete that race to be amazing athletes," he said. "I always thought someday I will do that."

Early in 2006, Sergeant Staffeld, then a civilian weighing 300 pounds, decided it was time to make some changes.

"I needed a lifestyle change, so I decided to lose weight and join the Air Force Reserve," he said.

In order to join the military, enlistees undergo medical examinations at a military entrance processing station. A person can be disqualified at this stage for being overweight. This was one of many challenges Sergeant Staffeld had to overcome.

"I had to lose about 70 pounds to get through MEPS," he said. "I made the cut-off by less than half a pound."

It was after joining the Air Force Reserve and being deployed to Balad, Iraq, in 2007 and 2009 that he took up running. This would lead to him competing in his first marathon and taking the next step in his lifestyle change.

"Late in 2009, I ran in and completed a marathon and decided that someday had come," Sergeant Staffeld said. "The next day, I signed up for a full-distance Ironman, which I completed last fall."

But even the Ironman competition would only be the beginning of Sergeant Staffeld's racing adventures.

"I have competed in 70.3's in Galveston, Lubbock and Austin," he said, explaining that a "70.3" is a race comprising a swim, bike ride and run totaling 70.3 miles. "I qualified for the World Championships at the Austin 70.3. I also completed a full Ironman competition (140.6 miles) in Louisville, Ky.



After watching Ironman competitions for years and dreaming about competing in one, Staff Sgt. David D. Staffeld finally took the plunge in 2010 and participated in his first event, in Galveston, Texas.

In addition, I have competed in several Olympic distance events around Texas.

The decision Sergeant Staffeld made in 2006 to lose weight and get in shape has encouraged others in his family to lead a healthier lifestyle as well.

"I found my way back to health and wellness a few years ago, but I can say that Dave has inspired me to go further with it," said his wife, Mary, a master sergeant in the 301st FW training office. "All three of our children work out regularly and are healthy young adults." ★

(Airman Harvey is assigned to the 301st FW public affairs office at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Fort Worth, Texas.)

COURTESY PHOTO

lected from multiple sources, including the U-2 Dragonlady, RQ-4 Global Hawk, MQ-9 Reaper and MQ-1 Predator, in direct support of overseas contingency operations.

The new squadron traces its origin to the 718th Bombardment Squadron, which was activated April 6, 1943. The squadron's lineage includes the 718th Strategic Reconnaissance Squadron. (AFRC News)

AWC Graduating Class Includes Eight Reservists

Eight Air Force Reservists were among the 240 people, including representatives of foreign military branches, who participated in graduation ceremonies May 25 at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala., for the Air War College class of 2011.

"Your year of professional study has changed each of you in some way, making you better prepared for the uncertainty that awaits you," said Maj. Gen. Robert Kane, AWC commandant, in his message to the class. "You have developed deep and enduring relationships with your classmates, even though, in many cases, you came from completely different backgrounds."

Reserve graduates were Lt. Col. Kenneth R. Council, Lt. Col. Derin S. Durham, Lt. Col. Lynette Herbert, Lt. Col. Bruce K. Johnson, Lt. Col. Janet D. Pouncey, Lt. Col. Christopher R. Simpson, Lt. Col. David W. Smith and Lt. Col. James F. Ward.

Colonel Johnson graduated with "Highest Academic Distinction," meaning he achieved a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.95 on a 4.0 scale.

Colonel Herbert was the top distance learning graduate, out of a total of 626, earning her the Distance Learning Academic Excellence Award. The colonel said she was "honored and humbled" to receive the award. "I was proud to represent the Air Force Reserve, as the distance learning program is open to members of all military branches — active duty and reserve component."

The AWC distance learning program offers specific benefits for members of the Guard and Reserve by allowing them to complete AWC while remaining at their home station.

"Students can, within certain course constraints, build their own schedule,"

Pope's Puns



CARTOON BY RETIRED MASTER SGT. W.C. POPE

Colonel Herbert said. "This helps reserve officers meet civilian job requirements and family obligations while still completing their professional military education requirements."

Distance learning students are allowed up to 36 months to complete the program, which consists of six courses that are completed using web-based online content and testing, said Col. Dennis M. Armstrong, dean of AWC Distance Learning.

Colonel Armstrong noted the distance learning option offers people flexibility. Students can complete AWC distance learning by the correspondence method, in which they study on their own, or they can study as a group as a designated seminar. The seminar method can accommodate geographically separated seminar members, allowing them to connect electronically.

"For Reservists there is a third option," Colonel Armstrong said. "The Air Reserve Component Seminar mixes elements of both the correspondence and seminar methods. Students complete some of the courses independently and then travel to Maxwell AFB to complete courses as part of a classroom seminar."

"In this format, students have a coordinated, pre-determined time frame of study and testing, and the program is

completed in one- and two-year increments," he said.

The graduation ceremony featured guest speaker retired Lt. Gen. Daniel Leaf, who served as deputy commander, U.S. Pacific Command at Camp H.M. Smith, Hawaii, and vice commander of Air Force Space Command at Peterson AFB, Colo. General Leaf currently works for Northrop Grumman in Herndon, Va.

"I am confident that regardless of your nationality, branch of service, agency, or whether you are military or civilian, you will have the opportunity to apply the lessons learned here at Air War College in your next assignment and throughout your career," General Kane said. "When that opportunity comes, seize it with confidence knowing that your educational and personal experiences here have prepared you to excel as great colonels." (Some information for this article was taken from a story written by Kelly Deichert, Air University public affairs at Maxwell AFB.)

Group Exercise Classes Help Get Reservists Fit

New group exercise classes are having a big impact on the fitness level of Reservists assigned to the 446th Airlift Wing at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Every Saturday during a unit training assembly weekend, Capt. Vanessa Balint, 446th Force Support Squadron operations officer, with the help of a group of highly qualified fellow Reservists, leads two group exercise classes. The goal of these classes, Captain Balint said, is to help Reservists pass their biannual fitness test.

In a relatively short period of time — the classes began in January — the results have been impressive. As of Sept. 30, the end of fiscal year 2010, roughly 60 percent of Reservists within the wing had an unsatisfactory score on their fitness test, Captain Balint said. Seven months later, that number had been reduced to only 19 percent.

"We're held to the same fitness standards as active duty," the captain said. "This is our way to do what we can in the limited time we have during UTA weekends."

Tech. Sgt. Ed Callahan, a certified personal trainer, is one of the lead instructors for the group exercise class. He leads Reservists through various workout routines including circuit training, calisthenics, speed work and cardio exercises. In addition, he tries to be a valuable fitness resource for fellow Reservists, offering tips and tricks to anyone who needs a helping hand.

"Fitness is a passion of mine that has carried over from my time in the Marine Corps," said the full-time nursing student.

Captain Balint said the instructors try to keep the classes fun and upbeat, even though many Reservists are mandated to be there until they improve their fitness scores.

"We're not just going to run a mock fitness test," said Capt. Carianne Culy, 446th FSS fitness instructor and a certified personal trainer. "Instead, we try to focus on targeted activities involving the upper and lower body that will help us pass the fitness test." (Staff Sgt. Grant Saylor, 446th AW public affairs)

School Offers Online Deployment Manager Training

As part of the U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center's continuing goal of leveraging technology to assist in training, members of the Expeditionary Center's Mobility Operations School cele-



"Wild Thing" sits ready at Gowen Field, Idaho, to make its final flight to Hurlburt Field, Fla., May 7, 2010. The historic aircraft was retired and placed at the Hurlburt Field airpark May 6. The Talon had a 46-year Air Force career and recorded a total of 21,336.5 flight hours.

'Wild Thing' aircraft comes home to Hurlburt Field as historic monument

By Tech. Sgt. Samuel King Jr.

Exactly one year after making its final flight, an MC-130E Combat Talon I aircraft known to the Airmen assigned to the 919th Special Operations Wing who flew and maintained it as "Wild Thing" reached the end of its 47-year journey with a dedication ceremony at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

The Talon, on display at Hurlburt's airpark, will live out the rest of its life as a historic monument serving as a reminder for future Airmen of what came before.

Joining Reservists, regular Air Force members, historians and aircraft aficionados on hand for the May 6 ceremony were Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force James A. Roy and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz, a former Talon pilot and commander at Hurlburt.

"She was a good girl — the best flying aircraft we had," said Chief Master Sgt. Ken Potter of the 919th Maintenance Group

Chief Potter and six other 919th maintainers were tasked with getting the aircraft, tail No. 64-0567, prepared for its last flight from Gowen Field, Idaho, to Hurlburt in May 2010. The aircraft had

been at Gowen Field for three years. At the end of that flight, Wild Thing had recorded 21,336.5 flight hours.

In addition to flying missions in Vietnam, 567 participated in Operation Urgent Fury in Granada in 1983. In 1990, during Operation Just Cause, the aircraft carried President Manuel Noriega from Panama to Miami after his capture. The aircraft was assigned to the 919th in 1997. In 2003 it was one of the first MC-130Es to fly missions for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Guest speaker Chief Master Sgt. Dale Berryhill, a loadmaster in the 711th Special Operations Squadron, told the large crowd about the eccentricities of flying the Combat Talon.

"Each one has a unique attitude and often quirky personality," he said. "I hope this mighty Talon enjoys its time in the sun and that all its crew members and maintainers, young and old, stop by to visit their old friend. 64-0567 has served its crews and nation proudly." ★

(Sergeant King is assigned to the 919th SOW public affairs office at Hurlburt Field.)

brated the launch of the online unit deployment manager course in June.

Expeditionary Center officials at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, N.J., said the eight-hour online course was created as part of an overall plan to consolidate UDM training in the Air Force, as requested by Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force James Roy during a visit last year.

The UDM is an Air Force unit's primary representative to ensure deploying Airmen are trained and equipped to serve in contingency operations around the world. UDM responsibilities include arranging travel to and from the deployed location as well as documenting and monitoring all pre-deployment training, medical status and any other unit deployment issue.

With no actual Air Force specialty code assigned to the function, UDMs are often

Airmen serving in a wide variety of Air Force career fields taking on these responsibilities as an additional duty.

Prior to Chief Roy's request, UDM training was the sole responsibility of logistics readiness squadron officials representing every unit in the Air Force, said Maj. Charles Rock, the school's deputy chief of logistics programs.

"The LRS commander would then delegate responsibility for UDM training to the installation deployment officer, but standardization of training and the effectiveness of these programs varied significantly depending on location," he said.

Expeditionary Center officials started a comprehensive UDM course in October 2010 to assist installation deployment officers across the Air Force with providing standardized training for all UDMs. The weeklong in-residence course is held

12 times a year, training more than 240 UDMs annually.

In addition to the in-residence course, the Mobility Operations School has a mobile training team that has a goal of providing training to UDMs at more than 85 Air Force installations from every major command over a three-year cycle.

The mobile teams will visit approximately 28 installations per year, teaching about 600 students annually. This program has been up and running since February and has already completed 13 training sessions involving approximately 240 UDMs.

"With these mobile training teams we can train all UDMs on a given installation at a lower cost and a reduced TDY tempo for unit personnel," said Rudy Becker, MOS director. "We also want them to train as a team because they will likely be

'Eagle' rescues young barn owl from clutches of hawk

The wing commander at March Air Reserve Base, Calif., became an unlikely rescuer when he saved a fledgling owl from the clutches of a hawk.

Col. Karl McGregor, commander of the 452nd Air Mobility Wing, happened upon the "fowl" on his way in to work June 1.

"The action was in the middle of the road in my subdivision," Colonel McGregor said. "When my headlights swung onto the two birds, the hawk flew off and the owl went into hide mode by tucking its head under a wing."

The colonel got out of his car, walked up to the startled bird and noticed it was quivering but didn't appear to be wounded.

The 2-month old owl had tremendously large claws.

"I did a little operational risk management and decided to use an empty box that I happened to have," Colonel McGregor said. "The owl was actually very cooperative when I scooped him into the box."

He took the owl to Rebecca Rosen, a wildlife control officer with Falcon Environmental Services, which manages the Bird/Aircraft Strike Hazard program on March ARB. Ms. Rosen examined the owl and found no signs of harm. She identified it as a barn owl and estimated it at 60 days old.



Rebecca Rosen, a wildlife control officer, examines a 2-month-old barn owl chick at March Air Reserve Base, Calif. Col. Karl McGregor, 452nd Air Mobility Wing commander, rescued the disoriented chick from a street near his house.

According to Ms. Rosen, this is about the age that the baby would fledge (begin to fly). The reason the owl remained in the road and was not disturbed at all by being held by Colonel McGregor or Ms. Rosen is barn owls are a strictly nocturnal species and are basically immobilized during daylight hours. Ms. Rosen said this makes them

easy prey. A high mortality rate is one of the reasons barn owl adults have comparatively large clutches of chicks.

Ms. Rosen drove the owl to the Orange County Bird of Prey Center wildlife sanctuary in Lake Forest, Calif., later that day. ★

(Megan Just and Linda Welz, 452nd AMW public affairs, contributed to this story.)

deploying the installation as a team.”

However, center officials felt they could do more.

Mobility Operations School officials unveiled the UDM online training course in May and fielded it June 2. The course

is primarily used as a prerequisite for the in-residence and mobile training courses, but school officials said it is also extremely valuable as a stand-alone course for people waiting for formal training or as a refresher of core UDM knowledge.

Officials said anyone involved in current deployment functions can benefit from taking the online course. (Tech. Sgt. Zachary Wilson, U.S. Air Force Expeditionary Center, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.)

From the TRICARE Advisor

Paying for services not covered by Tricare

In my capacity as Air Force Reserve Command Tricare advisor, I've been asked many times over the years, "What am I, as a beneficiary, liable for when a health-care provider presents me with a bill for a service not covered under Tricare when I had no idea the service was not covered?"

This is a situation where you, as a beneficiary, must be on top of your Tricare game. Provided you are eligible for Tricare Standard or, for Tricare Prime enrollees, have a referral and are seeing an authorized Tricare provider, you are covered by Tricare's Non-Covered Services and "Hold-Harmless" Policy.

Generally speaking, Tricare network providers may not bill a Tricare beneficiary for non-covered services except in the following circumstances:

- If the beneficiary did not inform the provider that he or she is a Tricare beneficiary.
- If the beneficiary was informed that services were excluded or excludable and agreed to pay for the services in advance and in writing.

Payment agreements for non-covered services must be presented by the provider. Therefore, before receiving a non-covered service, you must be informed as a Tricare beneficiary in advance and in writing that the service is not covered under Tricare. If you choose, you may sign a waiver agreeing to pay for non-covered services.

However, if the provider does not obtain a legally signed waiver and the care is not authorized by the Tricare regional contractor, the provider, not the patient, is expected to accept full financial liability. In addition, a waiver signed by a beneficiary after the care is rendered is not valid under Tricare regulations.

For the beneficiary to be considered fully informed, Tricare requires that:

- The agreement is documented prior to providing the specific non-covered service.
- The agreement is in writing.
- The specific treatment and date(s) of service and billed amounts are documented.

General agreements to pay, such as those signed by the beneficiary at any time of admission (including those you sign in the doctor's office upon arrival as a new patient or when updating a doctor's existing records) are not evidence you know specific services are excluded or not allowable.

These documents are considered to be too general in nature.

Additionally Tricare requires authorized providers to maintain copies of waivers in their office and to fully inform beneficiaries in advance when specific services or procedures are not covered.

I strongly recommend that you discuss with the doctor's office staff in advance any procedures, lab exams or any other ancillary service your doctor advises to ensure services are covered. If the test, procedure or surgery sounds unusual or you are unsure if it's a covered service, seek assistance from a Tricare service center near you. If a TSC is not available in your area, call the regional contractor for further help.

In these tough economic times, asking questions about coverage will maximize your benefit and keep you out of financial hardship for paying medical bills you may not be responsible for. Your physician will also appreciate your questions and may offer other viable alternatives for your care.

Did you know Tricare covers HPV DNA testing?

Preventive care is vital for the early detection and treatment of serious issues that could affect your health. Tricare recently added the human papillomavirus DNA test to its list of approved preventive services.

HPV DNA testing can help doctors detect cervical cancer early, which results in prompt treatment and improved prognosis. For further information on this and other coverage, call or visit a Tricare service center near you or one of the following regional service contractors:

- West Region: TRIWEST, 888-874-9378.
- North Region: Health Net Federal Services, 877-874-2273.
- South Region: Humana Military Healthcare Services, 800-444-5445. ★

(I'm always pleased to receive e-mails and engage with beneficiaries. If you have a question regarding a benefit as it relates to a Reserve member or family beneficiary member, e-mail me at Alexander.Alex@us.af.mil.)



Lt. Col.
Alexander Alex

Former Reservist Takes on VA Post

Retired Brig. Gen. Allison A. Hickey, a 27-year veteran of the Air Force, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve, is the new Department of Veterans Affairs' undersecretary for benefits.

"General Hickey is a proven leader with deep experience and passion who is dedicated to the welfare of veterans, their families and survivors," said VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. "With her extensive knowledge, insight and commitment, I am confident we will achieve the bold and comprehensive changes that will continue the transformation of the Veterans Benefits Administration into a 21st century organization."

In her new position, General Hickey is responsible for a \$72.3 billion budget and benefit programs that include compensation and pension benefits for more than 4 million veterans and survivors, education programs including the Post-9/11 GI Bill, home loan guaranties, vocational rehabilitation and employment services, and one of the nation's largest life insurance programs.

General Hickey, a pilot and aircraft commander as well as a member of the first U.S. Air Force Academy class to include women, has 17 years of leadership in Department of Defense strategic and transformation planning, program and resource implementation, public and congressional affairs, and quality and organizational management.

She served as head of the Air Force's Future Total Force Office and assistant deputy director of Air Force Strategic Planning, leading one of the largest mission and culture change efforts the Air Force has gone through since its inception.

Additionally, General Hickey held the position of Air Force Future Concepts and Transformation Division chief, focusing on the integration of technologies, organizations and operations that became the model for the Air Force of 2025.

"As a recently separated veteran, I have first-hand experience with the transition processes that thousands of veterans and their families experience every day," General Hickey said. "I also have personal knowledge of the issues and sacrifices made by military families, including those of our National Guard and Reserve. I am excited to be part of the VA team focused on serving veterans."

General Hickey replaced acting undersecretary for benefits Michael Walcoff, who has served throughout the Veterans Benefits Administration including positions as deputy undersecretary, associate deputy undersecretary for field operations, deputy area director and regional office director. He will be retiring from VA after more than 35 years managing the department's benefits programs and 57 field offices. (Air Force News Service) ★

It's Your Money

By Ralph Lunt

How much is enough?

How much do I need to save to get me through my retirement? That's a tough issue that generates lots of other questions and just as many assumptions.

Still, because it sheds light on many variables, I feel that helping people answer this question is one of the most beneficial services that financial planners perform. Quite frankly, the answer really comes out not if but when you can retire.

Consider that any one of us still working could "retire" today. But many of us don't because we would not have the resources to provide for our basic needs. So how do you plan for retirement? I'll let you know what I see and how I am approaching this question.

First, this whole drill has to do with income sources and mandatory outflows. There are defined benefit income sources, such as military retiree pay and Social Security. Then there are savings and investments, which can be used or converted to income-producing assets.

In my case, I'm not planning to retire until after my kids are out of school and the house is paid for, thus minimizing mandatory outflow. At that point, it's food, taxes and discretionary expenses.

Clients who have their house paid off still feel the effects of inflation, the ups and downs of the stock market, etc., but they adjust discretionary outflow accordingly. Many live off Social Security and \$1,000 a month from their investment portfolio.

So, how much do you need to save in order to generate \$1,000 a month? Using a conservative 3 percent principal protection formula, you would need \$400,000. Initially, I'm not planning on tapping my investments at retirement. As long as my wife agrees, which is a key point, we plan to get by on my retiree pay and Social Security if we get it. When I do begin making withdrawals, I'll use an initial 3 percent withdrawal rate with a likely increase to 4 percent if needed in later years.

The big retirement unknowns are the stock market, taxes and medical costs. The stock market will do what it does. I'll maintain exposure to it but reduce significantly my investment in retirement. The country is in a fiscal challenge to say the least, and my plan is to budget for medical costs to triple and taxes to double.

Keep in mind that retirees don't complain about having too much money, just not enough. The key to the retirement "how much" question is all about minimizing outflow and knowing that expenses will pop up. Adjust your life and plans accordingly. ★

(Editor's note: This feature is designed to provide financial advice and information of a general nature. Individuals should conduct their own research and consult a financial adviser before making any financial decisions. Based in Cleveland, Ohio, Mr. Lunt is a certified financial planner and vice president of a financial planning and consulting firm. He is also a colonel in the Air Force Reserve, serving as the reserve forces director for the Great Lakes region of the Civil Air Patrol adviser's program.)





NO NORMAL FITNESS

Physical, social, spiritual and mental wellness are all important pieces of the puzzle

Say the word “fitness” and most people immediately think of banging out push-ups in the gym or taking off on an early morning run before work. And while being in good physical shape is definitely an important component of being fit, it’s not the only part. Air Force officials have been studying “fitness” for years and what they have found is that there are actually four components to comprehensive fitness: physical, mental, social and spiritual.

“The Air Force and Air Force Reserve Command are dedicated to developing a culture of resilience, and we think the best way to do that is to encourage fitness in all four areas,” said Col. Brian Masterson, AFRC’s command surgeon. “Airmen with strong mental, physical, social and spiritual fitness have the ability to withstand, recover and even grow in the face of stressors and changing demands.”

Physical fitness means meeting fitness standards and leading a healthy lifestyle that includes exercise, rest and nutrition.

Mental fitness requires effective coping skills, a strong self-image and a positive approach to life. People who are mentally fit demonstrate self-control and make good choices.

Social fitness means having a strong sense of belonging and connection to the people around you. It’s being able to develop and maintain trusted, valued relationships that are personally fulfilling and provide a safe place to exchange ideas, views and experiences.

Spiritual fitness is about having a sense of purpose and meaning in one’s life. It’s about strengthening the set of beliefs, principles or values that give someone a sense of well-being, hope and the will to keep going. Spiritual fitness is key to an individual just as esprit de corps is vital to a unit.

“Balance amongst the four areas of fitness is critical for military readiness and personal well-being,” Colonel Masterson said.

Over the next few pages, we will take a closer look at each of the four components of fitness and offer tips for Airmen and their families to build resilience as they strive for comprehensive well-being in their lives.

Physical: Exercise regularly, eat right and get plenty of rest

Physical fitness is probably the most obvious of the four components of comprehensive well-being, but for many people, it’s the biggest obstacle on the path to a healthy lifestyle. Finding the time to exercise is a challenge as is planning and preparing healthy meals and getting all the rest your body needs.

For a lot of people, getting started on a physical fitness program is the hardest part. For those people, help is usually close by. Health and fitness professionals at health and wellness centers, fitness centers and medical facilities on Air Force bases are qualified to help Airmen and their families achieve and maintain better health.

“The base fitness center is a great place to start,” said Master Sgt. Tina Robinson, first sergeant for Air Force Reserve Command Recruiting Service at Robins Air Force Base, Ga. A world-class power lifter, Sergeant Robinson spends a great deal of time pumping iron at her local fitness center.

“Talk to the professionals at your health and wellness or fitness center,” Sergeant Robinson said. “They can help you develop a physical fitness plan that includes strength training, aerobic exercise, and stretching and flexibility.”

If you don’t have a base fitness center in your area or you can’t afford the fees at a local fitness center, Sergeant Robinson offers the following easy ways to improve your physical fitness.

“Use stairs instead of elevators or escalators. Walk your dog. Park your car far out in the parking lot from your office or when

out shopping so you have to walk more. Do push-ups and sit-ups while watching TV. Jog around the neighborhood or use a local school’s track. Or just get up and dance!”

Starting a physical fitness program may be one of the best things you can do for your overall comprehensive fitness. According to the Mayo Clinic, “physical activity can reduce your risk of chronic disease, improve your balance and coordination, help you lose weight, and even improve your sleep habits and self-esteem.”

The clinic recommends following these five steps to get started on your own physical fitness program:

- **Step 1: Assess your fitness level.** Assessing and recording baseline fitness scores can give you benchmarks against which to measure your progress. Record your pulse rate before and after you walk one mile; how long it takes you to walk one mile; how many push-ups you can do at a time; how far you can reach forward while seated on the floor with your legs in front of you; your waist circumference as measured around your bare abdomen just above your hipbone; and your body mass index.

- **Step 2: Design your fitness program.** As you come up with a plan, keep these points in mind:

- Consider your fitness goals. Having clear goals can help you gauge your progress.

- Create a balanced routine. Most adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity or 75

minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week. Adults also need two or more days of strength training a week.

- ❑ Go at your own pace. Start cautiously and progress slowly.
- ❑ Build activity into your daily routine. Schedule time to exercise as you would any other appointment. Plan to watch your favorite show while walking on the treadmill, or read while riding a stationary bike.

❑ Plan to include different activities. Different activities can keep exercise boredom at bay. Alternate among activities that emphasize different parts of your body, such as walking, swimming and strength training.

❑ Allow time for recovery. Plan time between sessions to give your body an opportunity to rest and recover.

❑ Put it on paper. A written plan will help you stay on track.

• **Step 3: Assemble your equipment.** Start with your shoes. Make sure you pick shoes designed for the activity you have in mind. If you're planning to invest in exercise equipment, choose something that is practical, enjoyable and easy to use. Try out certain types of equipment at a fitness center before investing in your own.

• **Step 4: Get started.** As you begin your fitness program, keep these tips in mind:

❑ Start slowly and build up gradually. Warm up and cool down with easy walking or gentle stretching. Then speed up to a pace you can continue for five to 10 minutes without getting overly tired. As your stamina improves, gradually increase the amount of time you exercise. Work your way up to 30 to 60 minutes of exercise most days of the week.

❑ Break things up if you have to. Fifteen minutes of exercise a couple of times a day may fit into your schedule better than a single 30-minute session.

❑ Be creative. Include various activities in your workout routine, but don't stop there. Take a weekend hike with your family or spend an evening ballroom dancing.

❑ Listen to your body. If you feel pain, shortness of breath, dizziness or nausea, take a break. You may be pushing yourself too hard.

❑ Be flexible. If you're not feeling good, take a day or two off.

• **Step 5: Monitor your progress.** Retake your personal fitness assessment six weeks after you start your program and then again every three to six months. You may notice that you need to increase the amount of time you exercise in order to continue improving. If you lose motivation, set new goals or try a new activity. By planning carefully and pacing yourself, you can establish a healthy habit that lasts a lifetime.

Regular exercise is just one part of the physical fitness puzzle. To work effectively, your body also needs the right diet and the right amount of rest.

For the latest from the U.S. Department of Agriculture on a proper diet, check out ChooseMyPlate.gov. The USDA recently replaced its food pyramid with a plate to simplify the quest for a healthier diet. ChooseMyPlate.gov is loaded with information

about food groups, healthy eating tips, dietary guidelines, daily food plans, food trackers and much more.

Among the most basic tips on the site:

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Make at least half your grains whole grains.
- Switch to fat-free or low-fat (1 percent) milk.
- Avoid oversized portions.
- Compare sodium in foods like soup, bread and frozen meals and choose the food with lower numbers.
- Drink water instead of sugary drinks.

"There's no substitute for a healthy diet," said Col. Brian Masterson, AFRC's command surgeon. "In order to be physically fit, you have to fuel your body with the right kinds of food. We live in a world of skipped meals and fast food on the run when what we really need is a balanced diet of fruits, vegetables, grains, protein and dairy products."

When it comes to getting the right amount of sleep, the best thing you can do is listen to your own body and try to get the amount of sleep that is right for you. There is no magic number, according to the National Sleep Foundation.

While sleep needs are individual, there are some guidelines that might help you on a path toward healthier sleep and a healthier lifestyle. Most adults, for example, need between seven and nine hours of sleep per night, teens need 8.5 to 9.25 hours and toddlers need 12 to 14 hours.

What researchers have discovered recently is that the path to healthier sleep patterns is further complicated by the relationship between a person's basal sleep need, the amount of sleep needed on a regular basis for optimal performance, and sleep debt, the accumulated sleep that is lost to poor sleep habits, sickness, awakenings due to environmental factors or other causes.

While scientists are still learning about basal sleep need and sleep debt, they all agree that lack of sleep can lead to serious health consequences and jeopardize your safety and the safety of individuals around you. The National Sleep Foundation offers these tips to help pave the way to better sleep:

- Establish consistent sleep and wake schedules, even on weekends.
- Create a regular, relaxing bedtime routine.
- Create a sleep-conducive environment that is dark, quiet, comfortable and cool.
- Sleep on a comfortable mattress and pillows.
- Finish eating at least two to three hours before your regular bedtime.
- Exercise regularly during the day or at least a few hours before bedtime.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol products close to bedtime and give up smoking.

"Physical fitness is a key component to a person's overall well-being," Colonel Masterson said. "With regular exercise, a balanced diet and a healthy sleep plan, we can all make great strides toward living a healthier life." ★



Social: Cultivate healthy relationships with family, friends

The word "social" can be defined as pertaining to, devoted to or characterized by friendly companionship or relations. "Fitness" is the condition of being physically in shape and healthy or the quality of being suitable to fulfill a particular role or task.

Put the two together and "social fitness" can be defined as the ability to live a long, healthy life with purpose, strengthened by family, friends and interactions with others.

Social fitness is a critical piece of the comprehensive fitness puzzle. As people shift in and out of various relationships and roles in life, it is imperative that they effectively communicate and work together. They must be patient when others see things differently than they do.

As social beings, humans thrive on acceptance, camaraderie and love. They become more productive and exceed expectations when allowed to express opinions, ideas and views in a safe and non-threatening environment.

"A goal of the Air Force Reserve physical fitness program is to keep Citizen Airmen in shape and fit to fight," said Krystal Shiver, Airman and Family Readiness specialist at Headquarters Air Force Reserve Command, Robins Air Force Base, Ga. "We must tackle social fitness with a similar strategy."

"Life is not static. Relationships and situations never stay the same. We must be cognizant of the impact social fitness has on mission readiness.

Relationships with our families, with our friends, among our co-workers and in our communities all affect our ability to be mission ready. If we commit ourselves to staying focused on what really matters, it is easier to overcome unusual challenges and even enhance our resiliency as a total force."

The characteristics of social fitness include proactive behaviors — forming and maintaining relationships, being open to change, having the ability to trust, learning from mistakes, building upon strengths and focusing on a purpose.

"At home, at work and in our communities, we must not only lead by example but also appreciate the successes of those around us," Ms. Shiver said.

Networking with others, becoming a mentor to a child and spending time visiting with the elderly are examples of positive social interactions that can cause change. There's a lot of truth in what social anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: "Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Resilience is tested when an Airman flounders in reactive mode. Feelings of isolation or negative relationships will often force people to compromise or negotiate against their better judgment.

"Fear, uncertainty, weakness and isolation are all destructive forces that can lead to abuse, depression and even suicide or other self-destructive behaviors," Ms. Shiver said. "It is wise to separate

yourself from superficial relationships and unnecessary drama." The Air Force recognizes and values the importance of help-seeking behavior.

"As the force becomes more streamlined and efficient, the stigma of asking for help must be overcome," Ms. Shiver said. "More military and community resources are available now than ever before to Reservists and families geographically separated from a base. Leadership is more involved, and time is strategically set aside to provide better access to care. But it is a team effort. It is all of our responsibility to be aware of available programs and to refer others as needed — to be a wingman. Be sure to develop and maintain open communication with leadership and expect honesty and commitment in return."

The Air Force has a number of social programs and resources for families and communities. Find out from your Airman and Family Readiness Center, services coordinator, commander, chaplain or peers how to tap into the activities available to you — both at home and while deployed. To improve your social fitness skills, here are some tips taken from the Army's Real Strength website.

• Know your personal strengths and which traits strengthen the character of those around you. Use those strengths to work well with others in a give-and-take manner. This can lead to good working relationships and strong friendships.

• Communicate in a confident, clear, controlled and respectful way. Clearly express what you would like to say and be sure to listen well to the other person.

• Respond to others with constructive feedback. Criticism alone doesn't help. Provide concrete suggestions and praise to others so they can strengthen their skills and excel. People can be motivated to do well when they know they are on the right track and that their efforts are appreciated.

• While deployed, make sure to spend some of your downtime around others — even if it's something as simple as playing a game of catch.

• Look out for your friends. If you notice someone isolating him or herself, try to draw that individual into group activities.

• Take on leadership roles whenever possible. Building leadership skills is helpful at all stages of your military career and helpful in life outside the service.

• Reach out to others you think may need someone with whom to talk.

"Relationships really do matter, and being socially fit can help build resiliency," Ms. Shiver said. "If you have good relationships with family members, friends and co-workers, you will always have someone around who can help you get through the difficult times in life, just as you will be there to help those who are close to you." ★



Spiritual: Sense of purpose gives us the will to keep going

Of the four pieces of the total fitness puzzle, spiritual fitness might be the most difficult to define. For some, spirituality is a belief in a power operating in the universe that is greater than oneself. For others, it's a sense of interconnectedness with all living creatures. For still others, it's an awareness of the purpose and meaning of life.

Viktor Frankl, who spent years in a concentration camp and wrote "Man's Search for Meaning," defined spirituality as "the very essence of who we all are as human beings. It is the source of our life, our being ... that dimension that brings meaning to our lives."

While people may define spirituality differently, there is a growing consensus among health-care professionals that spirituality plays a role in a person's overall fitness.

"Spiritual practices tend to improve coping skills and social support, foster feelings of optimism and hope, promote healthy behavior, reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, and encourage a sense of relaxation," according to the University of Maryland Medical Center. "By alleviating stressful feelings and promoting healing ones, spirituality can positively influence immune, cardiovascular, hormonal and nervous systems."

Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Ralph DeVaul, who works with Air Force Reserve Command's Yellow Ribbon program, has counseled hundreds of service members over the years and has seen first-hand how spirituality can have a positive impact on a person's health, especially for Reservists.

"Citizen Airmen live in two interesting and demanding worlds," the chaplain said. "This dual life places demands and expectations not appreciated by 'just' citizens or on the other side by our regular Air Force counterparts. The trauma and tempo of war, the recurring deployments, watching a close friend be wounded or killed, the continued separation from family and friends — these can and do take an emotional, psychological and physical toll on us all.

"All of these things can have devastating spiritual consequences, resulting in anger at God, moral injury, and a loss of hope and faith. In the worst case, individuals may experience a hopelessness and helplessness that can lead to suicide or other destructive behaviors."

Chaplain DeVaul believes spirituality is multi-dimensional and interconnected with a person's physical, mental and social fitness.

"Spirituality is an individual thing," he said. "For some people, religion is part of their spirituality. For others, it is not. But spirituality is a lifelong journey. It is subject to change over time. A person can experience periods of intense growth fol-

lowing a difficult time or traumatic event. While spirituality is an individual thing, there might be ways to improve your spiritual fitness."

Chaplain DeVaul offers the following tips:

- Conduct a spiritual self-assessment. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you consider yourself spiritual or religious?
- Do you have spiritual beliefs that help you cope with stress?
- What gives you meaning in life?
- What importance does your faith or beliefs have in your life?
- Have your beliefs influenced how you handle stress?

- Are you part of a spiritual or religious community?

- Is this of support to you? How?

- Is there a group of people you really love or who are important to you?

- How should I address these issues in my quest for holistic well-being?

- Talk to a helping professional. "Consider talking to a military chaplain," Chaplain DeVaul said. "They are trained to 'meet people where they are' regardless of religious affiliation."

And, they are especially trained to assist individuals with moral, ethical, spiritual and religious questions.

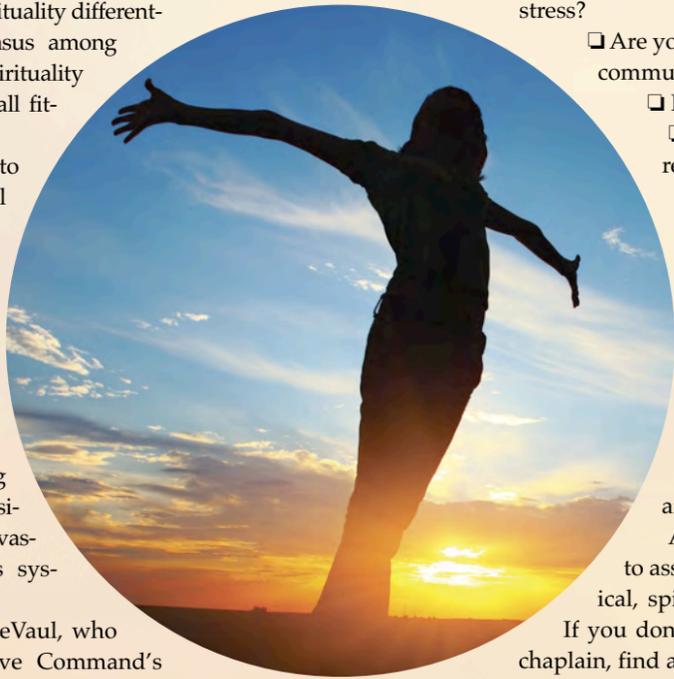
If you don't feel comfortable talking to a chaplain, find another counselor who can help you contemplate life's difficulties from a spiritual perspective.

- Keep a journal. Since there is an interconnection between the body, mind and spirit, consider journaling as a method of documenting psychological, spiritual and emotional events and the thoughts and emotions associated with these events.

- Take part in leisure activities. Leisure activities can serve as healing or calming events, contributing to a person's spiritual growth. Wilderness experiences, for example, can allow individuals to relax and connect with nature, their inner self and other people. Getting back to nature can take your mind off of everyday stress and put you in an environment that inspires greater self-awareness.

- Attend a Yellow Ribbon event. "If you are eligible, I would highly encourage you to attend a Yellow Ribbon event," Chaplain DeVaul said. "There are elements of leisure incorporated into the reintegration portion of Yellow Ribbon events around the country. In addition, there are resources available to help you work on your spiritual fitness."

- Share your experiences. Consider sharing your journal and/or spiritual discoveries with a helping professional or organization, such as a chaplain, pastor, church, synagogue or mosque. Your experience could help others who are trying to improve their spiritual fitness. ★



Mental: Healthy brains can keep growing throughout life

By Lt. Col. Dave Ubelhor, AFRC's chief mental health consultant

Maintaining and/or enhancing mental and emotional fitness is critical for all Air Force members. Some people seem to achieve this naturally. However, if you look closer, you'll likely see it's the result of some hard work and long-standing good habits. It all begins with good nutrition but involves much more. The good news is healthy brains remain capable of growth throughout a person's life, so everybody can improve their mental fitness.

For a long time scientists knew relatively little about the human brain compared to other parts of the body. However, recent advances in neuroscience have produced several discoveries about the health of active brains. All of them, without exception, emphasize the principle of "use it or lose it." Mental stimulation improves brain function and actually protects against cognitive decline, as does physical exercise.

Perhaps the most interesting trait scientists have learned about the brain is something called plasticity — the brain's unique ability to constantly change, grow and remap itself over a person's lifetime.

Without plasticity, the brain would remain static, frozen at a particular point in time. Every time the brain encounters information, it reworks itself to accommodate that information and creates a map so it can readily retrieve the information when it is needed. People always need to be able to store and interpret new information, making brain plasticity critical to function at all ages.

There are many ways to stay mentally active. Many people focus on improving memory. Others meditate, play challenging games, solve puzzles, read something different, tell stories or sing ballads.

Brain training is even becoming a trend. There are formal courses, websites and books with programs on how to train your brain to work better and faster. There are also mental fitness coaches or counselors. There is some research behind these programs, but the basic principles are memory, visualization and reasoning. Work on these three concepts every day, and your brain will be ready for anything.

You may also need to examine how you currently think in various situations. You can achieve a great deal by simply being positive. If, like Chicken Little, you tend to think pessimistically or catastrophically, learn how to approach life's challenges differently. Think, "What's the absolute worst that can possibly happen?" Then estimate the probability that each outcome will actually occur, given the circumstances at hand.

Identify the negative messages we all collect from past experiences and relationships and replace them with positive ones. Minimize the time you spend with negative people or watching depressing stories on television. Don't criticize yourself. Accept who you are and what you are capable of today. If you're not happy with something and it can be changed, change it!

Emotional fitness is an important part of mental fitness. The

Canadian Mental Health Association offers the following tips to develop and maintain mental and emotional fitness:

- Develop good coping skills. Learn to interrupt negative thoughts. Don't try to block them, but don't let them take over.
- Prioritize, and then do one thing at a time. Focus on the nuances of that one thing.

- Exercise. Regular physical activity improves psychological well-being and can reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. Joining a group can also reduce loneliness.

- Set personal and achievable goals. They don't all have to be overly ambitious, but reaching each will build confidence and a sense of satisfaction.

- Daydream. Breathe slowly and deeply. Close your eyes and imagine yourself in a relaxing location or with a trusted friend.

- Share humor. Life can get too serious, so when you hear or see something that makes you laugh or smile, share it with somebody.

- Volunteer. Helping others makes us feel good about ourselves, widens our social network and can provide us with new learning experiences.

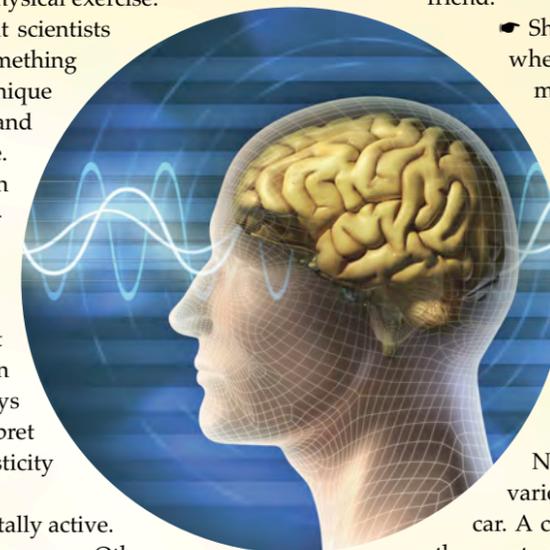
- Treat yourself well. Cook a good meal, enjoy a bubble bath, call a friend or relative you haven't talked to in ages. Whatever it is, do it just for you.

And don't forget to eat right. Nutrition influences brain function in a variety of ways. Think of your brain as a car. A car needs gasoline, oil, brake fluid and other materials to run properly. Your brain also needs special materials to run properly: glucose, vitamins, minerals and other essential chemicals.

Scientists know that certain nutrients and other key chemical compounds are essential to human brain function. Serious deficiencies in some of these, such as vitamin B12 and iron, can lead to impaired cognitive function due to neurological or nerve fiber complications. B-vitamins play a critical role in brain function. Sodium, potassium, calcium and magnesium are the key mineral ions in the brain and must be maintained in critical balance.

Another important aspect of mental wellness is admitting when you might need help. If you have genuine concerns about the health of your brain, seek help from a qualified mental health counselor or start with your primary care physician.

Finally, you can improve the chances for positive outcomes by setting realistic goals, anticipating what will come based on the factors involved and available resources, then planning and working through the steps to reach each goal. Don't become frustrated in situations you have no control over. Train yourself to take control of situations when you can or must and relinquish control when you can't or shouldn't. It's just as important to be a good follower at times as it is to be a good leader. The important thing is to actively work to maintain optimal mental and emotional fitness throughout your life-span. ★



Continuous Improvement

AFSO21 producing success stories throughout command, but there is still more work to be done

By Bo Joyner

Air Force Smart Operations for the 21st Century is taking hold throughout Air Force Reserve Command. At AFRC headquarters, Robins Air Force Base, Ga., and at Reserve locations throughout the country, teams of people are routinely getting together to thoroughly examine the work they are doing and coming up with ways of doing it better. And while there have been a number of AFSO21 success stories throughout the command, AFRC officials are encouraging all members of the Reserve team to continue to push for improvement in everything they do.

The Air Force introduced AFSO21 in 2007 as a standard approach for Airmen to pursue continuous process improvement. Since that time, the Air Force has been training senior leaders and facilitators so they can lead their organizations in process improvement activities and pushing all members of the Air Force team to apply AFSO21 principles to the work they do every day.

"It's amazing what our people have been able to do by putting AFSO21 tools to work," said Col. Eric Sitrin, director of analyses, lessons learned and AFSO21 at Headquarters AFRC. "What we've found is that AFSO21 works at every level, from the enterprise level to the wing level to the shop floor level. There's room for process improvement in everything we do."

At the enterprise level, a team led by Lt. Gen. Charles E. Stenner Jr., AFRC commander, used AFSO21 tools to develop AFR 2012, the general's vision to enhance the predictability and sustainability of Reserve forces. AFR 2012 is a series of projects designed to manage, mobilize and generate Air Force Reserve capability in a more efficient and effective manner while also strengthening Headquarters AFRC expertise in a wide range of new and emerging Air Force missions. At the center of AFR 2012 is the Force Generation Center—the command's one-stop shop for generating Air Force Reserve forces.

"AFR 2012 affects every member of the Air Force Reserve team and is a fundamental change in the way we do business in AFRC," Colonel Sitrin said. "It's our prime example of how we can use AFSO21 to improve processes at the command level."

At the wing level, there is no shortage of AFSO21 success stories. Take the 439th Airlift Wing at Westover Air Reserve Base, Mass., for example. To say the 439th has embraced continuous process improvement would be a tremendous understatement. AFSO21 has especially taken hold in the C-5 regionalized isochronal inspection process at the wing.

"We first started using Lean principles on this process in 2008," said Chief Master Sgt. Kathleen Wood, the AFSO21 process manager for the 439th. "Since then we have done seven rapid improvement events. Combined, these events have reduced the ISO flow process 43 percent, from an average of 35 days to complete the inspection to 20 days with consistent quality results.

"Changes were made in the ISO layout and set-up using 6S (Sort, Straighten, Shine, Standardize, Sustain and Safety) and by continuously mapping out the current and future states of the process," Chief Wood said. "During this time, the inspection cards were completely changed out. However, Westover maintainers were brought in on the redesign of the card decks and applied Lean thinking to that effort as well.

Using continuous process improvement tools, the 439th Airlift Wing at Westover Air Reserve Base, Mass., has reduced the time it takes to complete a C-5 isochronal inspection from an average of 35 days to 20 days.



Staff Sgt. Jason Palma works with fellow members of Westover's isochronal inspection team to attach 60-ton jacks to the C-5 after it was towed into the ISO dock.

"We also looked at the ISO repair cycle process," Chief Wood said, explaining that within the process, the aircraft panel stage had the longest turnaround time. "We knew if we could reduce the turnaround time, the fix would get done faster."

At the time of the rapid improvement event, the panel turnaround time was 6.37 days. The goal was to reduce it by 30 percent over a six-month period.

"By using a new process decided on by the team, we produced a turnaround time of 2.72 days, a 57-percent decrease in just four months," the chief said.

Recently, Westover submitted its C-5 Isochronal Inspection Lean Team for the Chief of Staff Team Excellence Award for 2011, and the team won at the AFRC level. It will compete in September for the Air Force-level award.

"I have been the facilitator of these improvement events from the start and could not be more proud of what the maintenance Airmen have learned about continuous improvement and Lean principles," Chief Wood said. "They know it works, and they have proven it to our wing, AFRC and the Air Force."

Continuous improvement isn't just tak-

ing place within the maintenance arena at Westover. Recently, Chief Wood facilitated a rapid improvement event to increase scheduling effectiveness of physical and dental exams at the 439th.

"Root cause analysis led us to untrained unit health monitors," the chief said. "The team has brought the scheduling effectiveness from 66 percent to 100 percent for some months, but no less than 90 percent consistently since the RIE. Also, we worked a number of action items to affect the flow of the physical process to get Airmen in and out and back to their work centers more quickly."

The commander of the 439th AW, Col. Robert Swain, is quick to give Chief Wood credit for the 439th's stellar continuous improvement track record.

"Every team needs a leader, and Chief Wood and her leadership is why we were named the best AFRC wing in 2010, best maintenance squadron in the command and shooting for the Team Excellence Award for the Air Force for our ISO dock," Colonel Swain said, adding that he is an enthusiastic advocate of continuous process improvement. "The bottom line is this process works. It saves time and money and returns assets to our war

fighters well ahead of schedule. I am a true believer and their biggest cheerleader."

The 919th Special Operations Wing at Duke Field, Fla., is another AFRC wing that has embraced continuous process improvement. A recent AFSO21 event there led to the establishment of super unit training assemblies to help Reservists get more bang for their training buck.

It all started when Col. Anthony Comtois, 919th SOW commander, "came to me with the question, 'How do we improve UTAs and maximize training for our Reservists while they're here?'" said Lt. Col. Raymond Porrata, 919th SOW wing process manager.

"Obviously, there are so many distractions on a typical UTA that trying to focus merely on training is nearly impossible," Colonel Porrata said. "There are so many changes of command, commanders' calls, meetings and retirement ceremonies, for example, that the time is just not available to do all the training you want to do."

Hoping to find the best answer to the wing commander's question, Colonel Porrata initiated a process improvement

event. After going through the eight-step improvement process, his team suggested the 919th SOW adopt the super UTA concept, similar to the one already in place at the 403rd Wing at Keesler Air Force Base, Miss.

"We benchmarked off of what Keesler was doing," Colonel Porrata said. "We interviewed their key personnel to find out what their lessons learned were so we could incorporate them into our own planning."

Basically, a super UTA is two UTAs rolled into one. At Duke Field, the current plan for super UTAs looks like this: One month out of the year, Reservists gather for four days instead of the normal Saturday and Sunday UTA. One of the additional UTA days is reserved for mass training, while the other is set aside for unit training.

The wing conducted its first-ever super UTA April 1-4, and Colonel Porrata said most of the feedback he has received has been positive.

"People got a lot of their ancillary training done, not just the briefings and the classes, but all the classes that we need to take via computer-based training," he said. "So the fact that we set aside time for that without the distractions of meetings, unit ceremonies and so forth really paid off in terms of meeting training requirements."

As an added benefit, Duke Field Reservists did not have a UTA in June since the two additional days for the April super UTA were "borrowed" from the June UTA.

"People really like that because they don't have to worry about drill," Colonel Porrata said. "They have a whole month

to do family things and so many other quality of life activities."

In addition, Reservists who routinely commute for training saved money on travel by not having the UTA in June.

Carrying on the theme of continuous process improvement, Colonel Porrata and his team are already looking for ways to improve on the super UTA concept before next year's super UTA in April.

One thing that will be different is the next super UTA will take place from Thursday through Sunday, instead of Friday through Monday. That way, only one civilian employment work week, instead of two, will be impacted.

The 439th AW and 919th SOW are just two examples of AFRC units that have put AFSO21 principles to work improving the way they do business. The fact is continuous process improvement is happening at Reserve locations all around the country.

"People throughout AFRC have done a tremendous job of embracing continuous process improvement, but as the name implies, CPI never ends," Colonel Sitrin said. "We can take great pride in where we've come on our process improvement journey, but we still have a long way to go."

To find out how you can put AFSO21 to work to make improvements in your work area, contact your unit's process improvement manager or Lt. Col. Craig Plain, HQ AFRC's AFSO21 support branch chief, at DSN 497-1947 or via email at craig.plain.1@us.af.mil. ★

(Information for this article was taken from 919th SOW news articles written by Dan Neely, 919th SOW office of public affairs.)



Tech. Sgt. Cecil Guy dons an M-50 gas mask at a familiarization class during the 919th Special Operations Wing's first four-day training weekend at Duke Field, Fla., in April. The wing instituted the super unit training assembly concept after a continuous process improvement event.

TECH. SGT. SAMUEL KING JR.

The new Air Force Personnel Services website is the one place for all Airmen, civilians and retirees to take care of their individual personnel needs.



All-In-One

New website consolidates personnel services information

By Senior Master Sgt. Tom Kimball

The future of Air Force human resource management is now available to the total force through a new website called Air Force Personnel Services or AFPERS.

With more than 4,000 articles of relevant human resource information available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, AFPERS is designed to be the one place for all Airmen — active duty, Air National Guard and Air Force Reserve — as well as civilians and retirees to take care of their individual personnel needs. The AFPERS website has been designed to help focus users' search so that only the most relevant articles, rather than hundreds of unrelated items, percolate to the top of each query.

"In other words, all personnel knowledge pertinent to your Air Force career has been retooled and reorganized so you can get what you need when you need it," said Col. Patricia Blassie, commander of the Air Reserve Personnel Center in Denver.

By streamlining personnel services and making them more efficient with AFPERS, "we are empowering Airmen to better manage their careers without taking up their precious duty time or tying up valuable personnel resources," Colonel Blassie said.

Specifically, she said, "Airmen who hold full-time civilian positions while serving in uniform part time will find the nuances of their particular service needs on AFPERS to be relevant right now."

Under the direction of the secretary of the Air Force, personnel professionals were tasked by senior leadership to provide services to everyone working for the total force on one website. AFPERS is the culmination of years of coordination, development and knowledge consolidation involving the personnel centers for the Air Force, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard.

When a person logs on to the website — either with a username and password or a Common Access Card — he or she selects among one of five pull-down menus. The menus correspond to the various categories of users: active-duty Air Force, Air Force Reserve, Air National Guard, retiree and civilian. Sub-categories — officer, enlisted, human resources specialist and employee — narrow the criteria even further.

Those who already have an account on the virtual Personnel Center-Guard and Reserve automatically have access to the new AFPERS site. vPC-GR remains unchanged and is available by clicking on the vPC-GR link on AFPERS. Those who do not have a vPC-GR account can visit the AFPERS website from any computer, anytime and from anywhere in the world, at <https://gum-crm.csd.disa.mil> and create an account. ★

(Sergeant Kimball is an individual mobilization augmentee assigned to the ARPC public affairs office in Denver.)



Finest Dining

Westover club earns praise, dinner prepared by top chef
By 2nd Lt. Andre Bowser

Celebrity chef John Besh, right, prepares a gourmet meal for employees of the Westover Air Reserve Base, Mass., club.



Club workers on bases across the country are often the first to show up to prepare food for the troops and the last to leave long after the masses have been fed.

But all that changed June 11 for the staff of the club at Westover Air Reserve Base, Mass., and for a select group of club workers from two other Air Force Reserve Command bases. They were served

dinner prepared by celebrity Chef John Besh, who owns several high-end restaurants across the country.

The Westover staff workers were honored for winning first place in the 2011 Fer de Lance competition for operating the command's best club. Westover beat out clubs from March ARB, Calif.; Homestead ARB, Fla.; Dobbins ARB, Ga.; Grissom ARB, Ind.; Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport Air Reserve Station, Minn.; Youngstown ARS, Ohio; Pittsburgh IAP ARS, Penn.; Niagara Falls IAP ARS, N.Y.; and Duke Field, Fla.

"They were judged on their overall club operations, from recipes, menus and food preparation to sanitation processes," said Sheila Idigpio, chief of business operations for AFRC Services at Robins Air Force Base, Ga. Applying the translation of the Fer de Lance award to describe the club, Ms. Idigpio said "they truly are the tip of the spear."

"We put a lot of hard work" into earning this award, said Westover club manager Erin Lahart

In addition to Chef Besh's dinner, the Westover club staff received \$5,000 to improve the club and a crystal trophy. Homestead's club came in second and received \$2,500. Some Homestead club staff members, along with people from Youngstown, attended the dinner.



"We try to do something every year that's going to benefit the club and the base population," said Alan T. Ray, AFRC Services deputy chief. "The program's goal is to provide an avenue through competition to improve our club operations and customer service."

"We truly wanted to serve those who serve us every day across AFRC."

AFRC Services officials said the celebration at Westover was their largest event to date.

Behind two sets of the doors in the club's kitchen, with only minutes to finish and serve an impressive array of dishes, Chef Besh plied his trade with a deft familiarity, although it was his first time in this kitchen.

The former Marine said he recalled flying into Westover nearly two decades ago on his return from the Persian Gulf. He said he jumped at the opportunity to serve the club workers after their impressive achievement, and he described the night's fare as "a taste of New Orleans."

Ms. Lahart said the experience was a veritable feast for the mind and eyes. "The food was unbelievable; it was by far the best meal I have ever had," she said, "I couldn't have asked for a better celebration dinner, from the décor to the food to the company."

The menu included shrimp remoulade with Mirliton salad; chicken and Andouille gumbo; roast Managalista pork with crabmeat, Silver Queen corn and Bananas Foster.

Allan Burns, a custodian at the club, said the award was a long time in coming. "We came in second place in 2006," he said. "Finally, we won." ★

(Lieutenant Bowser is assigned to the 439th Airlift Wing at Westover ARB.)

RADIATION

Reservists fill unique role in emergency preparedness

By Patricia Chavez

The mere mention of the word “radiation” invokes an almost universal feeling of fear and paranoia in people throughout the world. The recent Fukushima, Japan, nuclear power plant radiation spill should remind everyone that the threat of radiation contamination is real.

The severity of the Fukushima accident has been compared to the devastating 1986 Chernobyl meltdown (the world’s worst nuclear accident) in which thousands suffered from the radiation release. Thirty-one people died as a direct result. Thousands were relocated and approximately 5,000 suffered from serious health issues, including young children who absorbed radioactive iodine into their thyroid gland.

Radiation fear is a vital aspect of the radiological training provided by the Defense Threat Reduction Agency reserve component. Reservists are doing more than just serving in war zones these days to combat terrorism. These reservists are actively educating both Department of Defense and civilian first responders on how to prepare for any terrorist radiological incident.

“The reserve component instructs responders on how to respond to the threat of a radiological or nuclear incident,” said Air Force Lt. Col. Lisa Day, DTRA reserve component deputy chief. “We ensure that first responders understand what radiation is, and we correct many of the misconceptions about radiation.”

DTRA’s reservists have been on an important grass-roots movement establishing themselves as a unique training resource for the DOD, federal, local and state first responders. The RC is made up of multi-service reservists, providing training on response and support to civil authorities to mitigate consequences of a weapons of mass destruction

attack. First responders are typically firefighters, police officers and emergency management technicians.

“This training is crucial to those who are on the front lines of responding to an incident, radiological or otherwise,” said Air Force Capt. Thomas Poupakis, the RC’s officer in charge. “The DOD and other federal, state and local agencies are taking the threat of terrorism seriously and are being proactive in preparing agency members and local responders on incident response and awareness of the effects of exposure to radiation.”

A terrorist attack using nuclear or biological weapons can likely be expected before 2013, according to a report issued by the Commission on the Prevention of WMD Proliferation and Terrorism (January 2009). The commission was established to address the grave threat that proliferation of weapons of mass destruction poses to the United States, and the director of national intelligence publicly agreed with the report’s threat assessment.

Because of this threat, former Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates empowered the National Guard and Reserves when he merged active-duty military and reserve components into an “integrated total force.” This validated the reserves’ homeland defense role by mandating “that the National Guard and Reserves have a lead role and form the backbone of DOD operations in the homeland,” as written in the Nov. 26, 2008, memorandum from Secretary Gates.

This memorandum stemmed from recommendations made by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves established by the Ronald Reagan National Defense Authorization Act, which was tasked to assess roles, mission and funding of the National Guard and Reserve components.

DOD continues to address threats posed by proliferation of WMD material, weapons and technology that is a direct physical threat to the United States and other nations as delineated in the 2010 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review. The QDR is a legislatively mandated review of DOD strategy and sets out the priorities of the reserve component.

The recommendations from the QDR and the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves report led Secretary Gates to issue his memorandum, which gave the reserve components a lead role in homeland response.

“U.S. defense leaders consider the threat of terrorism a very real risk and have made it more urgent,” Colonel Day said. “We can’t rest on our laurels and be complacent because we haven’t had a major attack. We have to be prepared to respond.”

The RC is based at the Defense Threat Reduction University (DTRU) located at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M. The RC has a great working relationship with the DTRU. They provide training in-residence on a monthly basis. They assist with some of the DTRU courses and are able to use DTRU resources, including classrooms and live radiation training sites. These training sites give a realistic environment and simulation for students to apply class instruction in the actions required of a radiological emergency team member. Students receive hands-on instruction and experience in the use of radioactivity monitoring instruments.

Additionally, the RC takes its mobile training teams on the road, training all over the nation.

“The best part of the mobile training is that it is virtually free,” Captain Poupakis said. “The only cost is travel for the highly experienced reserve and guard subject matter experts that provide the training. We’re saving our customers thousands of dollars and providing invaluable training.”

The RC has received excellent feedback on its training.

“All guardsmen should have this training requirement,” said Col. Mark Coers, U.S. Joint Forces vice chief of staff. “It was the best training I have had in 19 years,” said Lt. Col. George Como, after attending the course.

The component’s reservists have a vast



Reserve Tech. Sgt. Jermaine Williams, right, teaches students how to properly use radiation detection equipment at the Defense Nuclear Weapons School.

array of knowledge, ranging from nuclear engineers to health physicists to law enforcement experts. Some have 30-plus years in emergency planning and response, and nuclear science.

U.S. Navy Lt. j.g. Carlos Argueta is a police officer with more than 23 years experience in law enforcement ranging from emergency management to high profile critical incidents. He has served on the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force and Violent Crimes Task Force. He is on active-duty orders with the RC using his experience with the Albuquerque Police Department as a critical link to the local community.

“The work we do is incredible,” Lieutenant Argueta said. “The operation is very proactive, and we reach out to the community on various levels. The education piece is important to the community at large. The responders live in the community that they protect, and the training trickles down to the rest of the community.”

The Introduction to Radiological and Nuclear Incident Response training is one of the first courses to receive American Council on Education accreditation at the Defense Nuclear Weapons School. ACE accreditation gives higher education organizations the ability to give college credit and requires the course to meet its extensive requirements.

In addition to the accreditation, the RC

has met other significant milestones, including acquiring 35 Air Force billets, two Army billets as well as Navy augmentees on an as-funded basis to assist in their mission. They have trained more than 800 first responders and national guard members, including 16 mobile training courses nationwide.

“We’ve come a long way from the 15-person shop with the initial idea that the RC would augment the DTRU during weekday classes,” Colonel Day said. “It is a very exciting time for us. We still have a lot of work to do, and we’re working hard for the way ahead. We are currently working with federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security, to train all potential responders to a WMD incident and bridge the gap between military and civilian first responders.”

The goal of the IRNIR course is to leverage the unique skills and experience of the RC staff to increase first/second responder, incident commander, Civil Support Team, National Guard, military and civilian expertise in CBRNE response to mitigate the consequences of WMD attacks.

“The focus is on providing command, control and coordination — expertise and life-saving measures,” Captain Poupakis said. ★

(Ms. Chavez is assigned to the Defense Threat Reduction Agency public affairs office at Kirtland Air Force Base, N.M.)

GOOD DOG

TSA detection canine honors 9/11 victim, meets his friends

Story and photos by Staff Sgt. Erin Smith

Maltby, a female black lab that is part of the National Explosives Detection K-9 team program, spends her days ensuring travelers are safe and that explosives don't make their way onto planes navigating the world.

Qualifying for her job alone makes her elite, as only the top 30 percent of puppies born into the program are cleared to go through the rigorous dog training at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas, which will prepare them for jobs ranging from security to sniffing for explosives.

"It's a personality trait," said Tara Corse, Maltby's handler within the Transportation Safety Administration. "They want dogs with focus and who are jazzed up all the time to do their job. They don't want to have to motivate the dog to work. The dog has to want to work."

Ms. Corse, who, as a senior master sergeant in the Air Force Reserve, serves as first sergeant for the 48th Aerial Port Squadron, Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, describes Maltby as a sweetheart and an outstanding detector dog.

"The scope and the ability that the dogs have is amazing," said Ms. Corse, who was named 624th Reserve Support Group First Sergeant of the Year and Pacific Air Forces Outstanding Reserve First Sergeant of the Year for 2010. "The fact that they can break scent down to a molecular level and can search and find items in areas that you would never think of. Things that are buried deep in boxes or underneath a whole pile of things. They are using their olfactory sense, which is immensely greater than ours. She impresses me every day."

Maltby's name makes her even more special. With it, she carries on the legacy of 9/11 victim Christian Maltby, a 37-year-old assistant vice president for currency trading at Cantor Fitzgerald. Mr. Maltby died on the 105th floor of the north tower, the first of the Twin Towers to be struck during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001.

Ms. Corse said it is a little intimidating to handle a dog whose name carries such a legacy, but she doesn't let it affect her. Her approach to dog handling, as well as her life in the Reserve, is to assess an entire situation before reacting. She said being a dog handler has taught her patience.

"You have to be patient with your dog," she said.

She had to learn to control her emotions and to not take a situation at face value, but instead to assess it and get the information required to make a sound decision.

"Everything goes down leash," Ms. Corse said, explaining

how dogs are very much in tune to their trainers or handlers and often pick up on their emotions.

During one of her first dog competitions when she was a teenager, Ms. Corse was doing well in the competition and had made it pretty far when she started to feel the pressure and became nervous. Her nerves traveled down the leash and her dog vomited, right in the middle of the show ring. Instead of freaking out or overreacting, she took a towel from her back pocket, wiped the dog's face and continued on with the competition.

At the end of the day, she took first place, in large part because of how she handled what could have been a negative situation.

Her attitude is the same when she is on-duty as the 48th APS first sergeant.

"Instead of jumping to conclusions," she said, "you have to step back and assess the entire situation before determining the steps necessary to work with Airmen. You never know what is going on in someone's life, and it is important to get to the bottom of the situation before reacting."

Ms. Corse said both jobs offer her the opportunity to watch improvement. As a first sergeant, she develops Airmen and as a TSA dog handler she hones Maltby's ability by presenting her with new challenges each day and ensuring she is staying on her game and always training and honing her skills.

With Maltby, sometimes the rewards are a little different.

Recently, the dog got to meet Irene Temple, a childhood friend of Christian Maltby. Ms. Temple, who enjoyed Maltby's abundant energy and said that she was delighted to meet her, also thought it was ironic that the breed of dog was named after her friend, who was a competitive swimmer in high school and college.

"He was a great swimmer," Ms. Temple said of Mr. Maltby. "It's funny that a lab was named after him because they are great swimmers, too."

Though cautious at first, Maltby soon lived up to her namesake and had no problems diving into the pool in Ms. Temple's parents' back yard. She swam with her and played fetch with her for a while and was sure to soak her new friend with a shake as she dried off before she departed. And just as the dog's namesake used to do, this Maltby made Ms. Temple smile. ★

(Sergeant Smith is assigned to the 624th Regional Support Group public affairs office at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam.)



Ronnie Molyneux (center) shrieks with excitement as she is introduced to Maltby, a black labrador retriever who is part of the National Explosives Detection K-9 team program. Tara Corse (left), Maltby's handler, introduced the dog to Ms. Molyneux and her daughter, Irene Temple (right) during Ms. Temple's visit to Hawaii. Maltby is named after Christian Maltby, a good friend of Ms. Temple and Ms. Molyneux who died during the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2011. In background photo, Ms. Temple watches as Maltby fetches a tennis ball. In the top photo, she cringes as Maltby shakes to dry herself off.





The 920th Rescue Wing, Patrick Air Force Base, Fla., has been involved in search-and-rescue and range-clearing missions for the shuttle program since 1981. Shown are photos from recent shuttle support missions.



THE END OF AN ERA

Guardian Angels carry out final space shuttle support mission

By Staff Sgt. Anna-Marie Wyant

When Space Shuttle Atlantis lifted off launch pad 39A at Kennedy Space Center and disappeared into the clouds over Florida's east coast July 8, it marked the end of an era for both NASA and an Air Force Reserve unit that has been supporting the nation's space program for almost 50 years.

For NASA, the 135th space shuttle mission — which involved a 12-day trip to the international space station — was the agency's last. The shuttle program is being terminated, and NASA has no replacement space transportation vehicle in place. The United States will now rely on Russian space ships to carry its astronauts into orbit until commercial transport vehicles are developed and ready to fly into space.

For the 920th Rescue Wing, located 11 miles south of Cape Canaveral at Patrick Air Force Base, the liftoff marked the end of its involvement in search-and-rescue and range-clearing missions for the shuttle program. The wing has been conducting these missions since the first space shuttle, Columbia, lifted off in 1981. However, its history with NASA goes back even further.

"Manned spaceflight is something the 920th Rescue Wing has been doing really since the early '60s, participating in one way or another,"

said Col. Robert Ament, vice wing commander.

The 920th RQW provided rescue-contingency support for the first Mercury launch in 1961, said Colonel Ament. This marked the beginning of the unit's long-standing relationship with NASA. For every manned space mission since, the 920th, along with regular Air Force rescue Airmen, have been present to clear the range and stand by in the event of a mishap.

The 920th RQW used HC-130 King air refueling aircraft and HH-60G Pave Hawk helicopters to transport their highly trained and effective rescue teams, often called Guardian Angels. Their unique combat search-and-rescue skills and equipment make them the most qualified in the world to respond to any emergency scenario, the worst being a problem that would cause the astronauts to bail out over the Atlantic Ocean during liftoff. To prepare for this scenario, the 920th RQW regularly performed exercises with NASA astronauts.

"I was one of the dummies they dropped off in the ocean and pretended I was incapacitated," said NASA astronaut Richard R. Arnold II. "They took good care of us. It's an amazing operation."

Mr. Arnold, who flew on a Space Shuttle Discovery mission in March 2009, said he is thankful for the support the 920th RWQ has given him and his fellow astronauts over the years.

"It's one of those things where you hope you never ever see those guys, but you're really glad they're there," he said of the Guardian Angels. "It's kind of a nice security blanket knowing they are there taking care of us."

With the shuttle program coming to an end, Mr. Arnold said he is proud to have been part of such an amazing pro-

gram. While many people focus on the astronauts, he said the program's end signifies so much more.

"It's an unusual day," Mr. Arnold said. "But to me, it's kind of a celebration of all the folks around the country who've made it all possible, including the 920th Rescue Wing. I don't think most people understand how much coordination and how many people are involved around the county to make this whole thing work and how we get each shuttle to fly safely. Today is all about them."

Colonel Ament expressed his feelings about the last shuttle launch and what it means for the wing.

"It's a bittersweet day; we had a wonderful launch, but we also had the last launch of the space shuttle program," said the colonel, who has been on approximately six NASA search-and-rescue training missions and 15 range-clearing missions. "Our training that we've done, our equipment we have provided for the space shuttle, and the specific equipment that we developed, built ourselves and used to rescue astronauts is significant, and it was a huge contribution to the overall space effort. But, with that going away, much of what we developed will in fact go away as well because we have no follow-on program identified."

So what's next for the 920th RQW? "We still have the rocket range-clearing mission, so we'll still keep that at least for the near term," Colonel Ament said. "But that is a much simpler mission in the fact that there is no rescue. If there is a situation where a rocket does explode, there is no recovery portion to that mission."

After 30 years of supporting shuttle launches, the 920th will focus more on its primary mission.

"Our No. 1 priority has to be to maintain mission-ready status for all personnel recovery forces," Colonel Ament said.

(Sergeant Wyant is assigned to the 920th RQW public affairs office at Patrick AFB.)



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