

AUSA Soldier/Family Council

Service That Truly Matters

On 3 February 2009, the Lawton-Fort Sill Chapter of the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) convened its first AUSA Soldier/Family Council. The charter council was made up of representatives of care givers, charitable organizations, and military and civilian support providers helping to take care of Soldiers/Families in Southwest Oklahoma.

These Soldiers are disabled veterans, recently discharged wounded veterans, and active duty and retirees from all components of the Army who are facing physical, mental and financial challenges. The purpose of the council is to coordinate and integrate Soldier/Family activities and programs locally and share information on national support agencies for maximum synergy and identify and fill gaps in support coverage.

The meeting was held at 1100 hours in the conference room of Northrup Grumman Corporation's Lawton, Oklahoma, office on Gore Boulevard with eight representatives of nine organizations attending, as shown in the group picture. The organizations and agencies represented at the charter meeting of the AUSA Soldier/Family Council were the American Red Cross, Fort Sill Family Life Consultants, Christian Family Counseling Center, Lawton-Fort Sill AUSA Chapter, Oklahoma Homefront, Military Officers of America Association (MOAA) and Marie Detty. The council will meet every other month.

Why convene a council? Following six years of support for two ground wars, challenges abound for our Army's care providers. Soldiers' rotation after rotation into harms way has challenged even the strongest Army families.

The Veterans Administration (VA) and local care providers struggle to keep up with the ever-growing number of wounded warriors. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), often invisible, challenges Soldiers/Families and our military community alike. Making matters more complex, wounded Soldiers discharged from the Army sometimes go months without VA benefits.

What does this unique environment mean to an organization like AUSA? It means our responsibility to serve Soldiers/Families has many opportunities--opportunities for service that truly matters.

In these challenging times, AUSA must look for ways to help. The Lawton-Fort Sill AUSA Chapter must be relevant if it is to live up to its charter. Our Vision Statement says we are the *Superpower for Soldiers/Families in Southwest Oklahoma*. If we are to make good on this promise, we must be ever-vigilant and ever-relevant.

The challenges that face our community are made easier by the character of our community itself. Nowhere across my 30-year military career have I seen a community and a post so closely connected as Lawton-Fort Sill. For many of us, this was the quality that brought us back to Lawton to retire.

The genuine concern for Soldiers/Families and community in Lawton-Fort Sill gives great reason for hope. Needs of Soldiers/Families do not go unattended in this community for lack of concern or lack of effort. Shortfalls are more likely to be because of a lack of coordination.

So how do we bring together the caring members of



Nate Slate, Council Chairman and Representative for Marie Detty, makes a point during the first meeting of the AUSA Soldier/Family Council on 3 February 2009.



The First Meeting of the AUSA Soldier/Family Council (3 February 2009). Front (L to R) is Gina Griffiths, Oklahoma Operation Home Front and American Red Cross; Cheryl Delgado, Fort Sill Military Family Life Consultant; Laurie Bartley, Fort Sill Military Family Life Consultant; and back row (L to R) is Dennis Meyer, Relevance Committee of the Lawton-Fort Sill AUSA Chapter; Bill Vaughn, Armed Services YMCA; Ted Janosko, Southwest Oklahoma Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA); Dr. Charles Baer, Christian Family Counseling Center; and Council Chairman Nate Slate, Marie Detty and Chairman of Lawton-Fort Sill AUSA Chapter Relevance Committee.

this community to take a panoptic look at the challenges Soldiers/Families face? The AUSA Soldier/Family Council is our chapter's response. Our council brings together the post, downtown care providers, and local organizations to see what our synchronous effort can do.

At our first meeting on 3 February, from the very onset, the local care providers began to coordinate with each other for support and value-added. They began to share information, resources and encouragement.

Although many issues were discussed at the meeting, the two key issues were care for wounded warriors in transition and care for Soldiers suffering from PTSD. I could not help but be moved by the level of concern and commitment this group demonstrated. It made me proud to be part of this community. It also gave me a new sense of purpose for AUSA. It was clear: the council is value-added.

What is the way ahead for the council? The council will expand to include representatives of other care givers and support providers in Southwest Oklahoma in the coming months. To maximize our impact, the Lawton-Fort Sill AUSA Chapter will revamp our website to provide the real simple syndication (RSS) the community needs. The website will include information that Soldiers/Families can use to answer their questions on the challenges they face or find the care givers and resources to support them.

There are many wonderful efforts in the Lawton-Fort Sill community and across America to help wounded warriors, Soldiers and their Families, but the connectivity is lacking. Care providers and Soldiers struggle to find the information and opportunities they need.

The Lawton-Fort Sill Chapter of AUSA can make the process simpler. For example, when care providers are helping a wounded warrior find a transition job, the database and contacts for this effort could be at their finger tips online. The goal is to develop the website's information and then design and launch the information management process to support Soldiers/Families online by the end of 2009.

We, as a community, can make a huge difference in the lives of Soldiers/Families. We can be the *Soldiers' Superpower for Southwest Oklahoma*. We must keep our hearts and minds open and work together. The AUSA Soldier/Family Council is dedicated to doing just that--providing service that truly matters.

Nate Slate, VP Relevance
Lawton-Fort Sill AUSA Chapter
Chairman, AUSA Soldier/Family Council