

By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

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Area retirees flock to annual event

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The 52nd annual Retiree Appreciation Day was Oct. 29 at the Lewis and Clark Center. The event included speakers, breakout sessions and more than 30 vendors and was attended by more than 700 attendees who traveled from Kansas and Missouri.

Fort Leavenworth Retirement Services Officer Michelle Grier planned and coordinated all aspects of the event. A shuttle service to and from the various parking lots was available to transport retirees directly to the main entrance of the Lewis and Clark Center, where retiree registration started at 8 a.m. in the atrium.

“We are literally honoring all of our (retiree) veterans from each of the sister services with this event today,” Grier said. “Among the main ideas is to provide various resources and information to help everyone stay informed about what is current and available.”

Members of the Fort Leavenworth Retiree Council facilitated the registration.

“This annual event is a chance for us to recognize retirees and provide useful information as well,” said retired Col. Norm Greczyn, co-chairman of the Fort Leavenworth Retiree Council. “The formal program always begins with our Garrison Commander, Col. Andrew Shoffner, giving an update specific to various projects and initiatives happening here at Fort Leavenworth. He opens his segment up at the end for a question-and-answer session. We also have a guest speaker. This year it is Lt. Col. Jon Sowards, who is the Central Region director for the Soldier for Life program office in Alexandria, Va. He will be speaking about the mission of SFL. And, we have several topic specific break out sessions where subject matter experts provide information relevant to military retirees, too.”

Complimentary coffee and donuts were provided and served by members of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers.

“This is an ideal opportunity to provide access to services that retirees may not have due to their lack of proximity to the post,” said Mark Salas, director of Human Resources for the Garrison. “The retiree appreciation program is also for spouses and widows. This allows a reconnection to the military for them, and to many useful programs. Many of these retirees traveled significant geographical distances just to be here.”

Vendors like AARP, Armed Forces Insurance, the Exchange, TRICARE and Staff Judge Advocate were on hand. Staff from Munson Army Health Center provided a flu shot clinic. The U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Navy and U.S. Marines were represented with uniformed personnel manning displays.

“Only 10 percent of our 18- to 24-year-old population today actually has had a parent or grandparent who served in the military. So, there is now an inherent societal disconnection with the military. We are reaching out to the retiree community and other influential community leaders with military ties,” said Command Sgt. Maj. Richard Lewis, senior enlisted adviser of the Kansas City Recruiting Battalion, 5th Recruiting Brigade.

Lewis said the brigade covers a large portion of the central United States centered upon the metropolitan areas of Dallas, Denver, Houston, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, San Antonio and Phoenix.

“We desire to connect today’s military with retirees, too, and want to make sure these veterans are aware of the current programs available to potential new enlistees,” Lewis said.

The Soldier For Life mission statement connects Army, governmental and community efforts to build relationships that facilitate successful reintegration of military soldiers, retirees and their families within communities. In his keynote address, Sowards emphasized that SFL is vital to helping people understand the exceptional training, critical skills and proven talents that transitioning soldiers bring to civilian life.

“I’m a third generation soldier and I have a deep appreciation for what everybody in this room has done — serve our nation,” Sowards said. “And, I also appreciate that we have a Retiree Appreciation Day. SFL is here to make connections between transitioning soldiers and communities.”

Retirees were also encouraged to visit the many sites, historic places and businesses on post and in the surrounding communities.

“Where I need your help is to continue to patronize the great facilities we have here on post that you enjoy,” Shoffner told the retirees. “We have a golf course, skeet range and other facilities that your patronage helps us maintain and provide for the community.”

“Retiree Appreciation Day allows me to reconnect with the military again,” said Stephen Euler, a retired former Military Police desk sergeant. “I retired from the military here at Fort Leavenworth in 1998, then worked for the city of Kansas City, Mo., for 16 years and retired from that. This is a great event at one of the best military bases there is.”



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Retirees, including retired Air Force Chief Master Sgt. Bob Markle, right, gather food samples and coupons offered by the Fort Leavenworth Commissary at Retiree Appreciation Day Oct. 29 at the Lewis and Clark Center. Markle, of Lee’s Summit, Mo., served in the Air Force from 1955-1992. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

To improve the Retiree Appreciation Day experience, organizers welcome comments via e-mail at usarmy.leavenworth.imcom-west.mbx.retirement-svs-office@mail.mil.

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