

By Christopher Burnett | Staff Writer

Print Page

February 16, 2017 10:50AM

Army Emergency Relief campaign kicks off

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Fort Leavenworth kicked off the annual Army Emergency Relief campaign with a meeting for key persons Feb. 15 at the Frontier Conference Center.

The AER campaign period is March 1 to May 15 each year. Fort Leavenworth collected \$55,115 in donations last year and distributed \$311,302 in loans and grants to soldiers, retirees and their families in need of assistance.

Now serving its mission 75 years, AER is a private, non-profit organization established to assist soldiers and their family members in emergency financial situations due to no fault of their own. AER was incorporated during World War II.

Army Emergency Relief Officer Mark Ramsey said the annual AER campaign is a great opportunity for community members to assist soldiers and families experiencing immediate emergency financial needs. He said the disparity between the total amount in loans or grants distributed to the amount of funds in donations received is deceptive because most of the funds are distributed as no-interest loans that are eventually paid back.

“Individual donations are very appreciated and important for Army Emergency Relief to continue providing the same type of programs and emergency assistance it has in past years,” Ramsey said. “As we celebrate 75 years, AER’s organizational purpose to alleviate financial distress is just as important today as it was in 1942.”

AER financial assistance is given in the form of an interest-free loan, grant or a combination of the two. Loans are repaid by an allotment.

“An advantage to utilizing AER is that if a soldier qualifies for a loan, there is no interest charge,” Ramsey said during the briefing to unit campaign representatives. “And, in addition to the loan program, there are grants available that do not need to be paid back.”

To apply for AER assistance, a soldier should begin at the unit level with an interview with his or her commander or first sergeant. The interview is part of a necessary vetting process to determine if the situation can be resolved through the chain of command or by some other source before seeking AER assistance.

Zach Stephens, AER campaign coordinator, said the effort relies heavily on the unit representatives to make contact with 100 percent of the personnel in their units.

“Mark and I are here to help representatives communicate the assets of the available programs at any time during the campaign period,” Stephens said. “AER helps soldiers and families. These funds come from voluntary donations from active and retired soldiers and civilians. Soldiers and retirees can contribute by allotment. Civilians donate to AER through a one-time contribution.”

Upon determining the soldier does indeed have a valid need for emergency assistance from AER, the unit commander formally authorizes the individual to seek AER assistance.

Sgt. 1st Class Nicholas Boos, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 705th Military Police Battalion (Detention), is serving as the AER representative for his organization. Boos said it is important for soldiers to get involved by donating to the campaign because contributions directly help other soldiers and their families in tangible ways.

“AER contributions are for purposes that benefit the force,” Boos said. “Even if you only use the services once in your career, the nominal donation is well worth it. If you never use it, it is important to know that your effort actually helps another soldier in big ways.”

In addition to loans and grants, three separate scholarship programs comprise the AER secondary mission to help Army families with education costs.

The Stateside Spouse Education Assistance Program is available to the spouse, widow or widower of an active-duty or retired soldier who resides in the United States. Stateside applicants must be full-time students. Assistance is provided for the first undergraduate degree only. Active-duty military personnel are not eligible.



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Staff Sgt. Melissa Snow, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Joint Regional Correctional Facility, and Sgt. Jacob Mahan, HHC, 705th Military Police Battalion (Detention), pick up Army Emergency Relief materials from Zach Stephens, AER campaign coordinator, at the AER campaign kick-off training meeting for key personnel responsible for contacting everyone in their units Feb. 15 at the Frontier Conference Center. The campaign, which helps soldiers and their families in financial need with grants and no-interest loans, officially kicks off March 15 with a local contribution goal of \$60,000. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

The Overseas Spouse Education Assistance Program is for the spouses of active-duty soldiers assigned to Europe, Korea, Japan or Okinawa. Applicants must reside with the soldier at the assigned location. Assistance is provided for the first undergraduate degree only. Off-post students are not eligible. Spouses may be part-time or full-time students.

The Major General James Ursano Scholarship Fund for Dependent Children benefits dependent children, stepchildren or legally adopted children of active-duty, retired or deceased soldiers. The children of gray-area Reservists and National Guard service members are eligible as well.

AER awards scholarships up to half the cost of tuition. Scholarship awards are based on financial need, as evidenced by income, assets, family size and special circumstances.

“The application season for the education scholarship programs are open until April 1, 2017,” Ramsey said. “You can find out more information about these programs and apply online at the AER website, <https://www.aerhq.org/Apply-for-Scholarship>.”

Soldiers and civilians can contact their organization AER key person to arrange a donation or contact Ramsey at 684-2852 or e-mail mark.l.ramsey.civ@mail.mil.

More information is available on the new Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation website by visiting <https://leavenworth.armymwr.com/us/leavenworth/programs/acs>.