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Soldiers, Commissary team up to feed families

The first effort to expand the annual Holiday Food Voucher Program on post was Dec. 20 at the Fort Leavenworth Commissary.

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The first effort to expand the annual Holiday Food Voucher Program on post was Dec. 20 at the Fort Leavenworth Commissary. Initiated by the post sergeants major to supplement the vouchers, 36 complete family meals were boxed by a group of soldiers representing military units and volunteer service organizations from the community.

Garrison Command Sgt. Maj. Michael Fuller said the addition to the program is based upon the idea to provide complete Christmas meals to military families in need. He discussed the plan with the installation sergeants major. With each on board to participate, Fuller contacted Sgt. 1st Class David Shaw, noncommissioned officer in charge of the Religious Services Organization, to coordinate the voucher gift management and then enlisted the support for execution of the program from other groups on post. He said the Commissary and its vendors were vital partners in the effort.

“It was an outstanding turnout in support of this first expanded holiday food program. We had all of the sergeants major from throughout the installation here, members of the RSO team, and many of our soldiers from (Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers) came out to support the effort today,” Fuller said. “We even had some commanders and a chief warrant officer assisting with packing the meals into boxes. But, the champion of this entire operation was the Commissary team. Specifically instrumental were Regenia Singletary and store director Glennie Morris. Without the two of them, this program would not have been possible.”

More than \$6,000 was donated; \$3,000 was collected through Holiday Food Voucher Program tithing, \$1,000 in food items was donated by the Commissary, and an additional \$2,000 was provided by vendors. Money that wasn't used to fill the meal boxes was distributed to soldiers' families in redeemable food vouchers. Units discretely delivered the food and vouchers to the soldiers and their families.

“When Command Sergeant Major Fuller came to our meeting and told us about the program, we were glad to volunteer our support,” said Pfc. Stephanie Jackson, a member of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 40th Military Police Battalion (Detention), and president of BOSS. “The idea of helping to ensure a family has a nice meal is important, but especially during the holidays when the spirit of the season includes such genuine service to others.”

BOSS member Spc. Michael Ford, Mission Command Training Program, said all of the members usually volunteer to support the community whenever they are available to do so.

“I'm just helping out other soldiers,” Ford said. “I try to support important initiatives like this as much as possible.”

Spc. Pavanta Davis, Garrison chaplain assistant, said Army society is historically known for taking care of its own and that cultural climate remains to this day.

“This is about giving to families during the holidays,” Davis said. “It's all about giving back.”

Pfc. Rachel Oilar, 526th MP Company, 40th MP Battalion, said NCOs are progressively trained to be the first echelon in the chain of command tasked with taking care of soldiers and their families.

“I have been in the Army for a year and three months. And, I have only been at Fort Leavenworth for eight months. It's great and I really love it so far,” Oilar said. “I heard about this initiative to provide food for families on post from a friend who is in BOSS and wanted to help.”

Commissary Manager Regenia Singletary, who also acts as the grocery manager, said being prepared for the soldiers who volunteered to assemble meal boxes was a matter of coordinating with vendors. She said being organized and doing that necessary planning in advance made the logistics work successfully.

“This is a great outpouring of goodwill and fellowship for our soldiers. As a mother with two sons enlisted, it warms my heart personally to see our military leadership in action to help soldiers,” Singletary said. “It started when Garrison Command Sergeant Major Fuller came to me with the idea to service a group



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Spc. Michael Ford, Operations Group X-ray, Mission Command Training Program, loads a box of holiday meal items into his car to distribute to a soldier's family in his unit Dec. 20 at the Fort Leavenworth Commissary. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

of families on post. And, what he and the other command sergeants major wanted to do was gift the selected families with a Christmas dinner.”

Singletary said that six Commissary vendors, including Liberty Fruits Company, Kraft Foods and Acosta, contributed. She said that the basis of supporting the food voucher program idea is centered upon using the vouchers that the Commissary earns from its participating vendors setting up product displays in the store.

“Without the cooperation of the participating vendors, we could not have done this because of the way (the Defense Commissary Agency) operates commissaries with regard to our inventory controls,” Singletary said. “When we presented this need, the response from our vendors was above and beyond. Several wished to remain anonymous, and each impacted the success of this program.”

Bob Swetnam, a merchandiser for Liberty Fruits Company at Fort Leavenworth, said the company was glad to take part in the food voucher program and provide food for the meals.

“Liberty Fruit Company is a vendor that supplies products to seven military commissaries from its Kansas City, Kan., warehouse,” Swetnam said. “And, whenever Regenia presents an opportunity for us to help in the community, we don’t hesitate.”

Fuller said the RSO was also instrumental in the execution of the program by coordinating with units for the distribution of gift vouchers as part of the Holiday Food Voucher Program.

“There were a ton of volunteers helping this morning. We had a great time,” Shaw said. “The Commissary had already pre-staged everything for us to quickly prepare each of the 36 meal boxes, using all of the individual lists that told us what items to include.”

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