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Families of fallen honored at Oktoberfest

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Oktoberfest fun included traditional German games, food, live music and beer Sept. 30 at Merritt Lake. The evening's festivities ended on a more somber note as the surviving family members of fallen service members launched lanterns onto the lake in memoriam.

Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth Commanding General Lt. Gen. Michael Lundy spoke with the 38 surviving family members from Kansas and Missouri who attended the event.

Col. Andrew Shoffner, Garrison commander, said Lt. Gen. Michael Lundy, commanding general of the Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth, spoke to the 38 visiting surviving family members from both Kansas and Missouri.

"(Lundy) stressed to them that their soldiers are not forgotten and that their families are always still a part of the total Army family," Shoffner said.

Shoffner explained the significance of why there is a celebration tied in with a memorial.

"We want our survivor families to be part of the community, he said. "They are our guests of honor tonight."

Lisa Pokorny, Survivor Outreach Services program manager, works with survivor families in 26 counties in Kansas and Missouri and invited them to Oktoberfest and the lantern launch. Pokorny, along with Maj. Moses Thompson, Command and General Staff College student, and Mallory Carmichael, Army Community Service volunteer coordinator, managed two tables that served as an assembly station where survivor families created the lanterns used for the tribute.

"We want to give back to these families as a way to show appreciation for them because they have loved ones who have given the ultimate sacrifice," Carmichael said. "We want to make sure that they know how special they are to us, and that we will never forget them."

Thompson said he wanted to be able to give more to the community.

"My family is back on the east coast and I have time to give, while other students may have their families here," Thompson said. "I wanted to be able to do something more than just be here in school. One of the Army values is selfless service and I've been raised to actually serve causes greater than myself, not just in the Army, but in my life in general. It is nice that Mallory and the folks at ACS make these types of volunteer opportunities available."

Oktoberfest originated in Munich, Germany, and has been an important part of Bavarian culture since 1810. The Munich Oktoberfest originally took place in the 16-day period leading up to the first Sunday in October. In 1994, the longstanding schedule was modified upon German reunification. If the first Sunday in October falls on the first or second of the month, then the festival would run until Oct. 3, which is German Unity Day. The festival in Germany now runs for 17 to 18 days, depending upon when the first Sunday occurs.

Fort Leavenworth celebrates for one day, and Zach Stephens, events coordinator for the Directorate of Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation, is responsible for many of the logistics in producing the local Oktoberfest.

"We started a few months out in the planning of this one day festival event. The first item is typically to book the band, and the next steps in the process include booking our vendors," Stephens said. "We were able to bring in one of our MWR sponsors as a food vendor, Grinders High Noon. Grinders prepared a special menu for today that includes German cuisine. The band is the Original Jolly Dutchmen, led by Stan Basgall, and is based out of Hays, Kan. They drive quite a distance just to get here. The band has become a traditional favorite with our attendees and the musicians have performed here for several years."

Anne Ley said the children in her family enjoy the German flavor of the event because they were stationed in Germany and lived there for several years.

"We were there for almost four years," said eighth-grader Gillian Ley. "I like the culture of Oktoberfest and Germany. I grew up there, so the festive atmosphere of this reminds me of those times and makes me happy."

"Oktoberfest is a tradition here, too, and six years ago we came up with the idea to include our survivor families by setting up a special tent," said FMWR director Glenn Hewitt. "We ultimately found out that our survivors actually wanted to integrate their memorial tribute within the festivities and be involved with everyone else from the community in attendance. It has subsequently developed into part of our event's tradition with the support of our command leadership. At the end of the day, we have a really fun Oktoberfest that includes the important message to our Gold Star families that we have not forgotten and we will never forget you."

As the dusk turned to darkness at Oktoberfest, a host of memorial lanterns floated away on Merritt Lake as glowing reminders of the many who have given the



PHOTO / KATIE PETERSON, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

Oktoberfest participants watch as memorial lanterns are launched onto Merritt Lake in memory of fallen soldiers Sept. 30. The lantern launch at dusk concluded an afternoon of music, dancing, traditional German food, horseback riding and hayrides. Photo by Katie Peterson/Fort Leavenworth Lamp

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