Press Release

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Fort Drum command team connects with community through virtual town hall

Fort Drum, NY - Maj. Gen. Brian J. Mennes, 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum commander, recently checked in with one of his Soldiers and asked how he and his family were coping during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The Soldier told him they were playing a lot of Uno. A classic, for-all-ages card game, Mennes thought. So when the commanding general returned home later that night, he dispatched his family to search the closets for their old deck of cards.

The 10th Mountain Division (LI) and Fort Drum command team went online April 1 for a virtual town hall to talk with community members about how life on post has changed because of COVID-19.

Mennes said that as more families are spending time together indoors, it is still important to respect each other’s personal space and not allow friction to divide the household. He said that Soldiers and family members should reach out for support when needed by contacting friends, a chaplain or counselor.

The Family Advocacy Program can be reached at (315) 222-3457 or 775-7103. To contact an installation chaplain, call (315) 772-5647.

Command Sgt. Maj. Mario O. Terenas, 10th Mountain Division (LI) senior enlisted adviser, said Soldiers are probably at home more now than ever before in their careers.

“That’s good,” he said. “This is the time to build family cohesion.”

Terenas said that the pandemic is forcing people to make tough, smart choices every day, with consideration of how their decisions will impact others.

“Think through everything you are doing every day,” he said.

Since the implementation of HPCON-C (Health Protection Conditions) measures on post, the biggest threat within the gated community is from those traveling from outside Fort Drum. Mennes said that is why additional screening protocols have been established at the gates. He has also directed Soldiers to notify their chain of command before inviting anyone onto post.

“We put things in place to identify people coming into our community,” Mennes said. “We know there are reasons for folks to come back into our community. There are many questions about how to deal with that, but first, the best thing to do is notify your chain of command.”

Col. Jeffery Lucas, Fort Drum garrison commander, said that preventing the spread of COVID-19 is the responsibility of every member of the community.

“We must think about the community as a whole, and we are doing that with the measures we are taking and the steps we are implementing,” he said. “We cannot be afraid to take care of ourselves and take care of each other in this pandemic.”

Lucas said that as a means of preventing people from congregating in a manner conflicting with social distancing measures, community playgrounds, dog parks and basketball courts have been blocked off. It was also brought to his attention that some people were “casual shopping” at the Exchange. Lucas said that community members should only shop for necessities, and do so in a purposeful manner. One way that can be accomplished is through the AAFES website where patrons can purchase items online and pick up at the store.

“Each of us has a responsibility to address these concerns when we see them,” he said. “If we see people congregating … I think we can – with kindness and in a very polite manner – ask that we enforce social distancing and request that for each other and ourselves as well.”

He echoed a message that was shared with him by a colleague serving overseas.

“The most important thing that we can do is to be polite, to treat people with kindness and continue to have a sense of community as we all work through this crisis,” he said.

The command team answered questions from community members on changes to commissary hours for retirees and Soldiers, housing moves and visitor passes. These changes are updated daily on the Fort Drum website at www.home.army.mil/drum and at www.facebook.com/drum.10thmountain/ where people can also view previous town hall events.

“Each day we are taking actions to protect our Soldiers, families, retirees and everyone who is part of our community,” Mennes said. “I just want to say thanks for the feedback. A lot of what you are providing to us in a very constructive manner is powerful.”

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