Press Release

Release Nr: 2004-07

April 17, 2020

Fort Drum Public Affairs

Fort Drum Soldiers and families find "much-needed morale boost and smiles" at the USO

Fort Drum, NY - Volunteers at the Fort Drum USO are working to connect with the community and provide much-needed support despite the disruptions caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

One way they are doing this is through distributions of face mask kits. Volunteers spent a few hours April 16 assembling hundreds of kits in preparation for the drive-through event on April 21 outside of the USO Center.

“This is filling a need for service members and their families, as many of them haven't been able to find the materials or aren't equipped to make masks themselves,” said Cheryl Christie, Fort Drum USO director. “When we have a new project, our volunteers are always excited to support with their time and dedication.”

Before COVID-19 struck the North Country, Shirley Heath volunteered to work the front desk at the USO Center, and she has been active with programs like the monthly Story Time.

“I think it’s great that we can still volunteer,” she said. “I have older kids, so I don’t have to worry about homeschooling or making sure they get their work done. So, I have a lot more time that I can volunteer.”

Heath said that she welcomes the opportunities to talk with the other volunteers, albeit from separate work stations, as they cut fabric and assemble the kits. She said it’s also rewarding to see people benefit from their efforts.

Lorena Currea has been volunteering with the USO since last September because she wanted to do what she could to support families, and that is especially true during the current health crisis. She said that staying active in projects with the USO lends a sense of normalcy to her life.

“It just feels good to volunteer,” she said. “It gives me something I can do other than being at home.”

The volunteers assembled twice as many mask kits as they did for the April 9 event, when their inventory of 300 was depleted within 45 minutes.

“We had a line formed up even before we were ready to start passing them out,” Currea said. “I’m glad we are doing this again.”

Christie said that they expect to have just as many people, if not more, driving through – especially since they also will hand out 300 sack lunches that day.

The sack lunch program, scheduled every Tuesday and Thursday, has proven to be popular on post.

“It’s been great just seeing all the families driving through in their vehicles and picking up lunches like a drive-through,” Heath said. “It’s one less meal they have to cook for themselves, and they know that every Tuesday and Thursday they can come here, get their lunch and eat it together as a family.”

Christie said that generous contributions from local businesses and eateries have kept people’s spirits up with donated meals and snacks. Regular coffee and donut deliveries have been made to medical personnel and military police on duty, as well as for quarantined service members. She said that a huge donation of protein bars was circulated to members of the workforce who are still on post.

Additionally, the USO has been able to provide quarantined Soldiers with a care package of toiletry items, as well as plenty of board games and decks of cards to keep them entertained.

“We hope that they feel the USO’s support and that the donations are providing a much-needed morale boost and smiles,” Christie said. “Our community partners have really stepped up to support 10th Mountain Division (LI) Soldiers in quarantine.”

Like many organizations, the Fort Drum USO transitioned their programs and activities to virtual ones.

“We have been continuing some of our normal programming virtually, which includes Coffee Connections, Story Time and Craft, and volunteer meetings,” Christie said. “We’ve also added a virtual ‘What’s Cooking at USO Wednesday.’”

Dee Brown, USO Center operations supervisor, started the cooking segment off sweet with a whipped coffee recipe that garnered more than 1,500 views. The USO Pathfinder program also is providing virtual transition services and workshops to assist Soldiers and family members with resume building, networking and employment readiness skills.

Christie said that they are also accepting new volunteers to the team, and that a “Virtual Volunteer Orientation” is scheduled at 10:30 a.m. every Wednesday. People can register for the orientation at www.volunteers.uso.org.

“We are always in search of volunteers, and I hope that we are able to engage Soldiers and spouses who are looking for a way to connect to their community with the virtual orientation,” Christie said. “Our team of volunteers are very important to us, and even during this stressful time that separates people, we provide opportunities for our volunteers to remain connected.”

USO volunteers still have regular meetings through videoconferencing, and Christie said their next gathering will include a game of virtual bingo.

“We also have a special ‘Sip and Share’ coffee hour with our volunteers,” she said. “We’d love to have more people begin their involvement with the USO by joining our team during this time.”

It’s hard to believe that a month has passed since the USO Center closed, but Christie said that it gave them the resolve to stay true to their mission.

“Once we had to close our doors, we quickly adjusted to new ways that the USO could continue to support service members and their families, and stand by our mission of keeping them connected to family, home and country,” she said. “The virus offered us an opportunity to do exactly what the USO is meant to do, which is to always be by their side. When we see or hear of an area of need, we do all we can to support.”

To find out more about what the Fort Drum USO and its volunteers are doing during the pandemic, follow them at www.facebook.com/USOFortDrum.

###

Captions:

#2. Lorena Currea, a volunteer at the Fort Drum USO Center, helps assemble face mask kits April 16 that will be distributed to community members. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

#4. Volunteers at the Fort Drum USO Center assembled roughly 600 face mask kits April 16 that will be distributed to community members on post. This is one of many programs and activities the USO is involved with to support the community during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. (Photo by Mike Strasser, Fort Drum Garrison Public Affairs)

Media with inquiries regarding this press release should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs, Julie Halpin, julie.a.halpin2.civ@mail.mil, 315-772-8286.