Press Release

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Fort Drum Public Affairs

**Trees for Troops brings holiday joy to Fort Drum Soldiers and families**

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (Dec. 9, 2022) -- Pfc. Justin Martinez was parked near the Main Post Chapel on Dec. 9, engine running and staying warm, waiting for the annual Trees for Troops event to commence. He arrived almost two hours early, right after the morning’s physical training.

That gave him plenty of time to think about the upcoming holidays.

“This is the first real Christmas tree for my wife and I,” said Martinez, with 41st Brigade Engineer Battalion, 2nd Brigade Combat Team. “We’re really looking forward to spending time with family, celebrating with good food and conversation.”

Soon after his arrival, even more Soldiers and family members began lining up for the same reason. Members of the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers hustled to get the freshly cut trees out of the trailer and lined up for everyone to take home.

Spc. Michael Schmidt said he arrived early to get the best tree for his wife and two young daughters.

“Honestly, it doesn’t matter the size or shape of the tree," he said. "What matters is that my kids are excited to decorate it. Each of us has an ornament that is sentimental to us.”

Schmidt’s wife, a former teacher, traditionally hangs an ornament made by her students. He has one made by a friend who died while serving overseas. His daughters also have their favorites.

Recently arrived at Fort Drum, Schmidt is a new medic with 3rd Squadron, 71st Cavalry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team.

“I’m looking forward to seeing my kids open up their presents, watch a Christmas movie with them, and listen to some music,” he said. “Just spending time with them is enough for me.”

The Spirit of Christmas Foundation’s Trees for Troops program has supported service members and their families throughout the U.S. and overseas since 2005, delivering more than 277,000 free, farm-grown trees to over 80 military bases.

Sharon Addison, Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (FMWR) director, said that Fort Drum has been involved with the program since its start. This year, 550 trees will be distributed to community members.

“This wouldn’t be possible without the Spirit of Christmas Foundation, and it’s really amazing,” she said. “It’s truly the spirit of giving and making a difference in the lives of Soldiers and families.”

Santa Claus made a special appearance to hand out small presents to the children in attendance.

“Santa loves to be a part of every FMWR holiday festivity, so it means so much to have him here to meet the families,” Addison said.

**Tree care and safety advice**

Earlier in the week, Fort Drum officials offered some tree-care tips during the Community Information Exchange forum at the Commons.

“Keep in mind, those real Christmas trees need to stay well hydrated,” said Fort Drum Fire Inspector Kevin Hazen, with Directorate of Emergency Services’ Fire Prevention Office. “It’s important to keep water in the base.”

He said that freshly cut trees can benefit from a can of citrus soda poured into the base for extra nourishment. When the roots are separated from a cut tree, it loses the ability to sustain itself. So in addition to water, soda that contains citric acid and sugar helps keep the tree fresh.

A freshly cut tree should be watered daily, as it can absorb a gallon of water in 24 hours. Hazen added that dried-out trees become a fire hazard, so prolonging their removal – well after the holidays have ended – is a risk no one should take.

Eric Wagenaar, Fort Drum deputy to the garrison commander, provided an additional tree tip to the Fort Drum community. When the fresh tree is brought home, first pour hot water into the reservoir. This softens the sap that has hardened at the base of the trunk and allows water to move upward easier.

“You also get that great pine smell,” he said.

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