

Press Release

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Mountain Meet-Up connects Fort Drum Soldiers, families, with essential services and more

FORT DRUM, N.Y. (May 29, 2025) -- Fort Drum Soldiers and family members found a wealth of information and networking opportunities inside The Peak on May 29 during the Mountain Meet-Up resource fair.

Hosted by the Relocation Readiness Program, with representatives from dozens of community agencies and organizations in attendance, the fair covered health care, education, recreation, volunteering and family support services.

“The idea behind Mountain Meet-Up is to bring together on- and off-post organizations that can help our Soldiers and families build their community connections,” said Kelly Bice, event organizer. “There’s a lot of things here that they can get involved with or receive assistance with – whether they are new to the area or maybe retiring soon or transitioning out of the Army.”

Bice said having organizations such as North Country Spouses’ Club, the YMCA, Jefferson Community College, and the Family Advocacy Program at the resource fair demonstrates the depth and breadth of opportunities available for people to thrive in the North Country.

Leon Donelson, with the Fort Drum Employment Readiness Program, held captive audiences at his booth, sharing stories with Soldiers while getting to know them. He said it was important, especially when talking to people new to the area or to the military, to give them the kind of information that will help them make positive, informed decisions.

“We’re talking about their lives and we’re talking about their careers, because employment readiness is about being ready all of the time,” Donelson said. “If people are comfortable enough to have a conversation, then they’ll start talking about the things they might not normally tell the general public. And that’s when I can see how we can help.”

With the North Country famous for its outdoor recreational activities, organizations such as the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center, Adirondack Mountain Club, New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation, and the 10th Mountain Alpine Club had plenty of suggestions for off-duty excursions.

“I found some nice places and things to do that are outdoors,” said Spc. Ryan Gonzalez, 1st Battalion, 32nd Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade Combat Team. “Being new to the area, I heard the hiking here is great.”

Ian Brambs, a founding member of the 10th Mountain Alpine Club, said his family quickly grew to appreciate the North Country environment and they decided to stay after he left active-duty service.

Brambs said that some people have the wrong idea about the weather – that it is three months of warmth and sunshine followed by a barricade-yourself-indoors winter.

“I got kind of frustrated about that with Soldiers back when I was in command,” he said. “You just need to go out and find activities to do in the winter, just as you would in the

summer, and you'll fall in love with this place."

Brambs said tearing down barriers that keep Soldiers from exploring outdoor activities was a motivating factor in establishing the alpine club.

"How can we get Soldiers out of the barracks to do something they can love and find an appreciation for this area, and do it year-round?" he said. "Whether its rock or ice climbing, skiing or snow shoeing, we have the training and the knowledge to help people with these skills. We have a bunch of people with extra equipment if someone wanted to come out and try something new."

Initially, the club's membership was mostly Soldiers, but it has become a community of passionate alpinists who welcome non-military members as well.

"I think that it was important for us to let people know that you don't have to be associated with the military to be a member," Brambs said. "It's really just bringing people together under the umbrella of alpinism, and then it's our way to do it in the spirit of the 10th Mountain Division, whose veterans were the founders of a lot of the outdoor recreation we enjoy today."

Community members can stay apprised of local events and activities at the Community Information Exchange, held at 10 a.m. every first Wednesday of the month. It is livestreamed at www.facebook.com/drum.10thmountain/ but people attending it inside The Peak have the added benefit of a mini-resource fair available before and after the meeting.

The Relocation Readiness Program also hosts a Spouse Connection event at 9 a.m., before the CIE, and at 6 p.m., at the Family Resource Center. The family-friendly event is an

opportunity for spouses to meet and mingle while receiving information relevant to military life. For more information, call (315) 772-6556.

“We’ve felt that this has provided a good foundation for anybody new to the installation to attend,” Bice said. “It’s all about building your community, because having those connections is what helps us become more resilient. Soldiers get battle buddies; spouses don’t. So, events like Spouse Connection helps show them there’s a community of support right here.”

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Imagery to support this story can be found at

: <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/499211/mountain-meet-up-connects-fort-drum-soldiers-families-with-essential-services-and-more>

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