

THE JRTC AND FORT JOHNSON

# GUARDIAN

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# Fort Johnson gets into Christmas spirit with toy drive

By PORSHA AUZENNE  
Public Affairs Office

FORT JOHNSON, La. — The holidays are the season of giving. That’s why Fort Johnson’s Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program hosts their annual toy drive ruck march and toy pickup. These efforts ensure Fort Johnson Families have an extra special holiday season.

More than a thousand Soldiers came to Anvil Field Nov. 30 dressed in their holiday finest. From ugly Christmas sweaters to Grinch and Santa costumes and even rucksacks lit with Christmas lights, the Fort Johnson community came together in an effort to bring cheer to military Families across the installation.

Once the march was complete, participants dropped off hundreds of toys at the BOSS warehouse, where Families were able to pick up presents for their little ones free of charge.

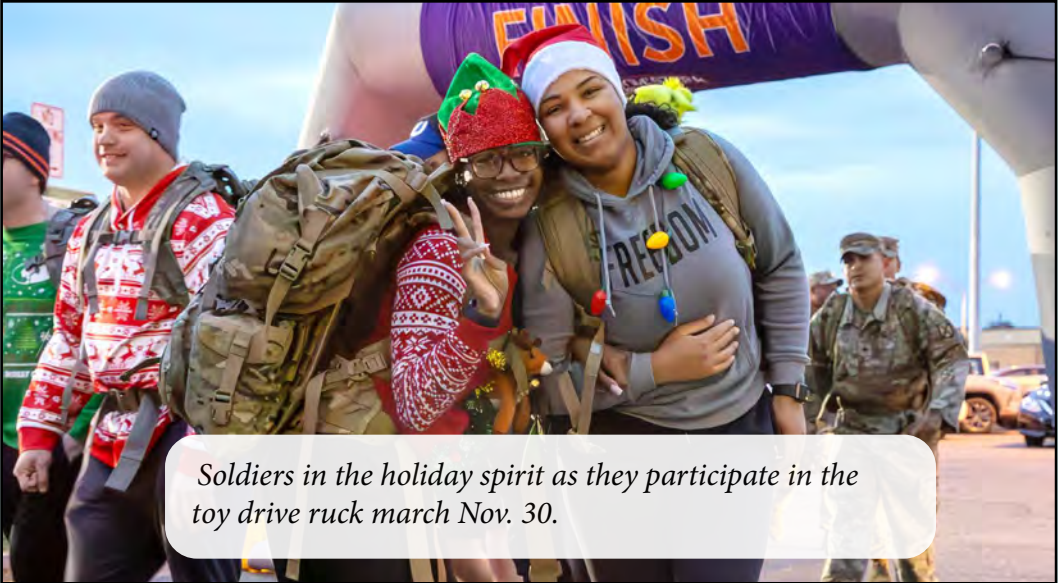
“The most important aspect of the toy drive is bringing the community together,” Whitney Cockerham, BOSS program administrator, said. “It helps bring holiday cheer to those who need it the most. Seeing the Soldiers work so hard to collect toys to donate always brings so much happiness to my heart.”

Spc. Kevin West, Fort Johnson BOSS president, said the toy drive is also important because it helps the single parent population know that BOSS sees them as a priority. Participation between leaders, Soldiers and the community in the ruck march was listed as another reason by West as to why the toy drive is important.

“Participation in the ruck helps build trust outside the uniform, which translates to better cohesion when we train and deploy,” West said. “It’s also about giving back to the community that supports us each and every year. BOSS couldn’t happen without all the awesome people on our installation. Giving back to military Families pays divi-



Egla Hays-Sepeda, military spouse, browses through a variety of toys at the Better Opportunity for Single Soldiers Toy Drive pickup Dec. 8 at the BOSS warehouse.



Soldiers in the holiday spirit as they participate in the toy drive ruck march Nov. 30.

dends into taking care of our people and earning trust for BOSS within units as a community of selfless leaders.”

When asked what the toy drive meant to West, he recalled his childhood as a major factor.

“The toy drive is important to me because I remember, growing up, how stressful the holidays can be on everyone emotionally and financially,” West said. “Seeing the happy smiles of relieved Families who can give their children a holiday they won’t forget is paramount to why I

do what I do as BOSS president.”

Egla Hays-Sepeda, a military spouse present at the Dec. 8 toy drive pickup, expressed what Fort Johnson holding the event meant to her.

“I think the toy drive is important,” Hays-Sepeda said. “It really lights up Christmas for kids and their parents who have financial troubles around this time of year. This is especially true for parents with two or more children.”

Toy donations were handed out Dec. 6-8 at the BOSS warehouse.



**JRTC and  
Fort Johnson  
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Links to the eGuardian are also included in all-users emails to government email users and by request to non-military units.

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For more information on Fort Johnson units and happenings visit the [@JRTCandFortJohnson](https://www.facebook.com/JRTCandFortJohnson/) Facebook page.



**Cover photo:** Santa, along with Col. CJ Lopez, Fort Johnson garrison commander, visits Parkway Elementary School Dec. 14 to meet with students and wish them a happy holiday. (Photo by PORSHA AUZENNE)







— FORT JOHNSON —

# HOLIDAY *Cheer*





# Santa, Mrs. Claus spread cheer to Families of Fort Johnson

By PORSHA AUZENNE  
Public Affairs Office

FORT JOHNSON, La. — Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus and their elves stopped early at Fort Johnson during the holiday season.

Hailing all the way from the North Pole, the group has already attended a multitude of events which include the Snowflake Festival and Tree Lighting Ceremony, bowling with children at Warrior Lanes Bowling Center and a visit to Alligator Lake Recreation Park.

They also visited children at Parkway Elementary and North Elementary and ventured into the local community areas of Leesville, DeRidder, Anacoco and Hornbeck.

However, few don't know Santa and Mrs. Claus have aliases outside of the gift-giving season.

Steve Humphries, Fort Johnson Casualty Assistance Center chief, and Dana Horn-Trujillo, retired Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Johnson protocol officer, make it their mission as Mr. and Mrs. Claus to bring joy to the children of Fort Johnson every year around the holidays. One of the ways they do this is by reading all the letters sent to them by the youth.

"We read every letter we receive," said Humphries, also known as Santa "Steve" Claus. "Some of the most touching ones are kids wishing for their military service parent to return home. An interesting one came from a young man who requested money for tattoos."

Horn-Trujillo, also known as Mrs. Claus, nodded in agreement as she discussed the letters she viewed.

"We had children who asked for various things, including a Bible, new clothes and shoes and dolls."

Santa and Mrs. Claus also addressed those who may not be having the jolliest of time.

"To people alone or not feeling jolly — re-



Santa and company visit with the students of Parkway Elementary and North Elementary Dec. 14.

member to reflect on the true meaning of Christmas," Santa said. "It's about hope and joy. If you're alone, there's always somebody out there for you. Whether friends, family or acquaintances, reach out and talk to them or shake their hand. There are agencies around the installation that would love to hear from you."

Mrs. Claus also gave advice for those who are feeling alone during the holidays.

"We all go through times when something in our life has changed, but Santa and I find when we give to other people, it brings us a special joy. Even if you are suffering through grief or a hard time, step outside your comfort zone and help bring joy to someone else. I promise you'll leave with a smile."

While Christmas is a time of gifts, Mrs. Claus reminded everyone of its importance.

"Presents are fun, but what's important is spreading love and joy," said Mrs. Claus, reminding everyone that Santa wants all chil-



dren to go home and tell those they live with how much they love them.

The Clauses would also like to wish the Fort Johnson community a happy holiday!

## Letters to Santa

This year I have been ☐ naughty ☒ nice.

For Christmas this year, I would like to ask you to bring me:

my daddy to come home

This year I have been ☐ naughty ☒ nice.

to be a elf

For Christmas this year, I would like to ask you to bring me: God days every day

my powers

Loi deals

A pupex.

Mis potato hede.

ps on chis mis eve let

me wake up to see

This year I have been ☐ naughty ☒ nice.

For Christmas this year, I would like to ask you to bring me:

Don't bother giving me a gift

present because I am going

to cruise so if you do give

me presents give me any thing

that is on your mind. ps I'm

turnin gina couple days. ps I

can't give you cookies beca

you know what so you.



# Home of Heroes Thrift Shop improves Fort Johnson quality of life

By ANGIE THORNE  
Public Affairs Office

FORT JOHNSON, La. — If you are looking to purchase something you need, there's a chance you'll find it at the Fort Johnson Home of Heroes Thrift Shop, 830 Colorado Ave. You can find gently used household goods, furniture, clothes and more at an affordable price.

However, the Thrift Shop isn't just about providing the community with shoes and food processors. It's also about taking the money made at the shop and putting it back into the community in meaningful and necessary ways through grants.

Samantha Rowlands, Thrift Shop manager, said the store plays an essential role in Fort Johnson's quality of life.

"I always tell people that come into the Thrift Shop, 'help us help you,'" Rowlands said.

With this theme in mind, the Thrift Shop continues to grow each year.

"My ultimate goal is to continue expanding our profits to increase the number of grants we can provide," Rowlands said.

In 2022, the Thrift Shop gave away a more than \$100,000. In the current fiscal year they have already given away more than \$17,000.

Rowlands is invested in continuing to help the Fort Johnson community.

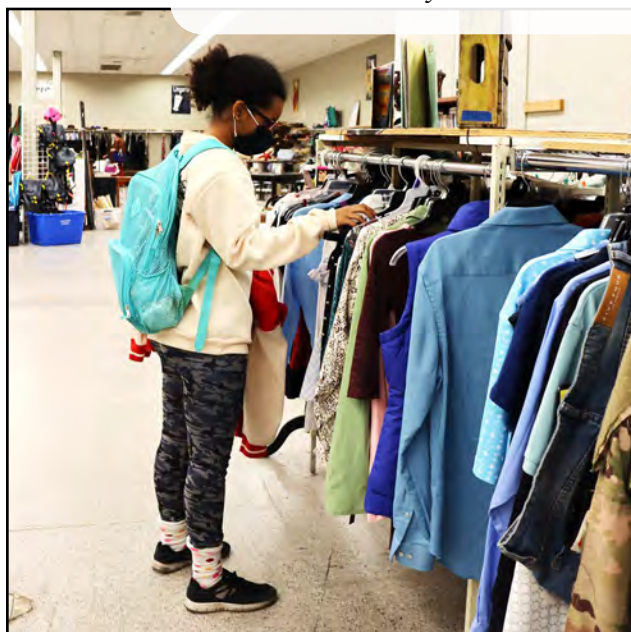
"I work hard because I can see the positive impact the Thrift Shop makes on the people who need it most," she said.

Alton Warwick, a frequent Thrift Shop customer, visits the store often and has always been a thrifter.

"I love the thrill of finding something amazing," War-



*Fort Johnson Thrift Shop customers love to hunt for treasures on the racks and shelves of the store.*



wick said. "The people are friendly, the prices reasonable and the sales are great."

Jessica Reiter, Thrift Shop publicity chair, said so many times the funds the Thrift Shop provides is what keeps organizations going.

"Sometimes they can't afford to accomplish what they need to and we can help them," Reiter said.

The Thrift Shop helps a wide variety of people and organizations including everything from the installation chaplains and local schools to community groups, sports teams, student scholarships and more.

How does the Thrift Shop continue to be successful? Endless variety. Thrift shops gather their stock from the surrounding community. The difference between Fort Johnson's shop and other donation-based stores is the donations offered by the Soldiers and Families have a more international flair based on the variety of places they have lived.

"We get donations from all over the world because that's where our Soldiers and Families have traveled," Reiter said. "That means

we have a truly eclectic supply of merchandise for people to browse through. You just never know what kind of treasure you'll find."

Another key to the Thrift Shop's success is its volunteers.

"The Thrift Shop couldn't run without our volunteers — those that help run the shop and are part of the board," Rowlands said.

If you would like to help continue making the Thrift Shop a success, volunteers are always welcome. Volunteers ages 13-15 must volunteer with a parent. Volunteers 16 and older can volunteer by themselves. Volunteers can either stop by the shop to speak with the manager or email the volunteer chair at [hohthriftshop.volunteer@gmail.com](mailto:hohthriftshop.volunteer@gmail.com)

To apply for a grant email the Thrift Shop grant chair at [hohthriftshop.grants@gmail.com](mailto:hohthriftshop.grants@gmail.com).

For more information visit <https://www.facebook.com/HomeofHeroesThriftShop/>



# Hospital earns 2023 Leapfrog Top Hospital Award for outstanding quality, safety

By JEAN CLAVETTE GRAVES  
BJACH PAO

FORT JOHNSON, La. — Highlighting its nationally recognized achievements in patient safety and quality, Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital was named a Top Rural Hospital by The Leapfrog Group, a national watchdog organization known as the toughest standard-setters for health care safety and quality. The Leapfrog Top Hospital award is widely acknowledged as one of the most competitive awards American hospitals can receive. Top Hospitals were honored Dec. 5 at the 2023 Leapfrog annual meeting and awards dinner in Washington, D.C.

Col. Takako Barrell, acting hospital commander, said BJACH was one of two in the state of Louisiana to achieve the Top Rural Hospital designation and the only military medical treatment facility in the Defense Health Agency to be recognized by the Leapfrog Group.

“Patient safety is our number one priority, and this recognition means a lot,” she said. “Our staff and beneficiaries should be proud. This award signifies how well BJACH compares to similar facilities across the nation and highlights our commitment to providing the best care to our beneficiaries.”

More than 2,100 hospitals were considered for the award. A total of 132 Top Hospitals were selected, including eight children’s, 35 general, 15 rural and 74 teaching hospitals.

The quality of patient care across many areas of hospital performance is considered when establishing the qualifications for the award, including infection rates, practices for safer surgery, maternity care and the hospital’s capacity to prevent medication errors. The rigorous standards are defined in each year’s Top Hospital Methodology.

“Protecting patients from preventable harm is the cornerstone of The Leapfrog Group’s mission,” said Leah Binder, president, and CEO of The Leapfrog Group. “BJACH has demonstrated that patient safety is their top priority, and we’re truly pleased to recognize them as a Top Hospital again this year. Congratulations to hospital staff at all levels who made this national recognition possible.”

Stacy Hall, chief of quality management at BJACH, said this recognition demonstrates the military medical treatment facility at the Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Johnson provides safe, quality-driven care to active-duty Soldiers, retirees and their Families.

“Achieving this award, for the second year in a row, shows a strong commitment from our team to protect our patients,” she said. “We are committed to a transparent culture of patient safety and process improvement. At BJACH we create an environment conducive to compassionate, patient centered, safe care.”

To qualify for the distinction, hospitals must



Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital showcases their awards for Top Rural Hospital by The Leapfrog Group.



Pictured from left: Stacy Hall, Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital chief of quality management; Col. Takako Barrell, acting hospital commander; BJACH Command Sgt. Maj. Larry White and Stephanie Parks, BJACH clinical outcomes nurse, pose with the Leapfrog Top Hospital award.

rank top among peers on the Leapfrog Hospital Survey. The survey assesses hospital performance on the highest standards for quality and pa-

tient safety and achieve top performance in their category. To see the full list of institutions honored as 2023 Top Hospitals, visit [www.leapfroggroup.org/tophospitals](http://www.leapfroggroup.org/tophospitals).



# Soldiers travel to Fort Johnson to leverage resources, improve patient care

By JEAN CLAVETTE GRAVES  
BJACH PAO

FORT JOHNSON, La. — William Beaumont Army Medical Center, Fort Bliss, Texas, answered the call for assistance by providing two respiratory specialists, Staff Sgt. Adolfo Uribe and Sgt. Christopher Allen, to support patient care at Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital, Fort Johnson.

Uribe, outpatient pulmonary services non-commissioned officer in charge for WBAMC, volunteered to help in the spirit of teamwork.

“This is the second hospital I’ve had the opportunity to help out like this,” he said. “I enjoy it. As the NCOIC, I am focused more on administrative tasks than patient care. This gives me an opportunity to stay fresh and up to date on my skills.”

Allen, a former Geronimo with 1st Battalion, 509th Infantry Regiment at Fort Johnson, reclassified to 68V (respiratory specialist) a year ago and is the inpatient services respiratory NCO at WBAMC.

“I love taking care of Soldiers,” Allen said. “Coming back to Fort Johnson to help out makes me proud. I know I’m helping the Army provide better patient care.”

Both Uribe and Allen agreed the experience has been great and the team at BJACH has been welcoming and supportive.

Lt. Col. Grigory Charny, deputy commander of clinical services for BJACH, said it’s important to have a strong respiratory team on staff.

“It is crucial to have respiratory services in both the outpatient and inpatient setting,” Charny said. “Especially now, during the season of increased likelihood of respiratory illness. Without these respiratory specialists, everything becomes more difficult whether it’s a breathing treatment in the clinic, an intubation in the emergency room, or continued respiratory and pulmonary care on the wards when a patient is admitted.”

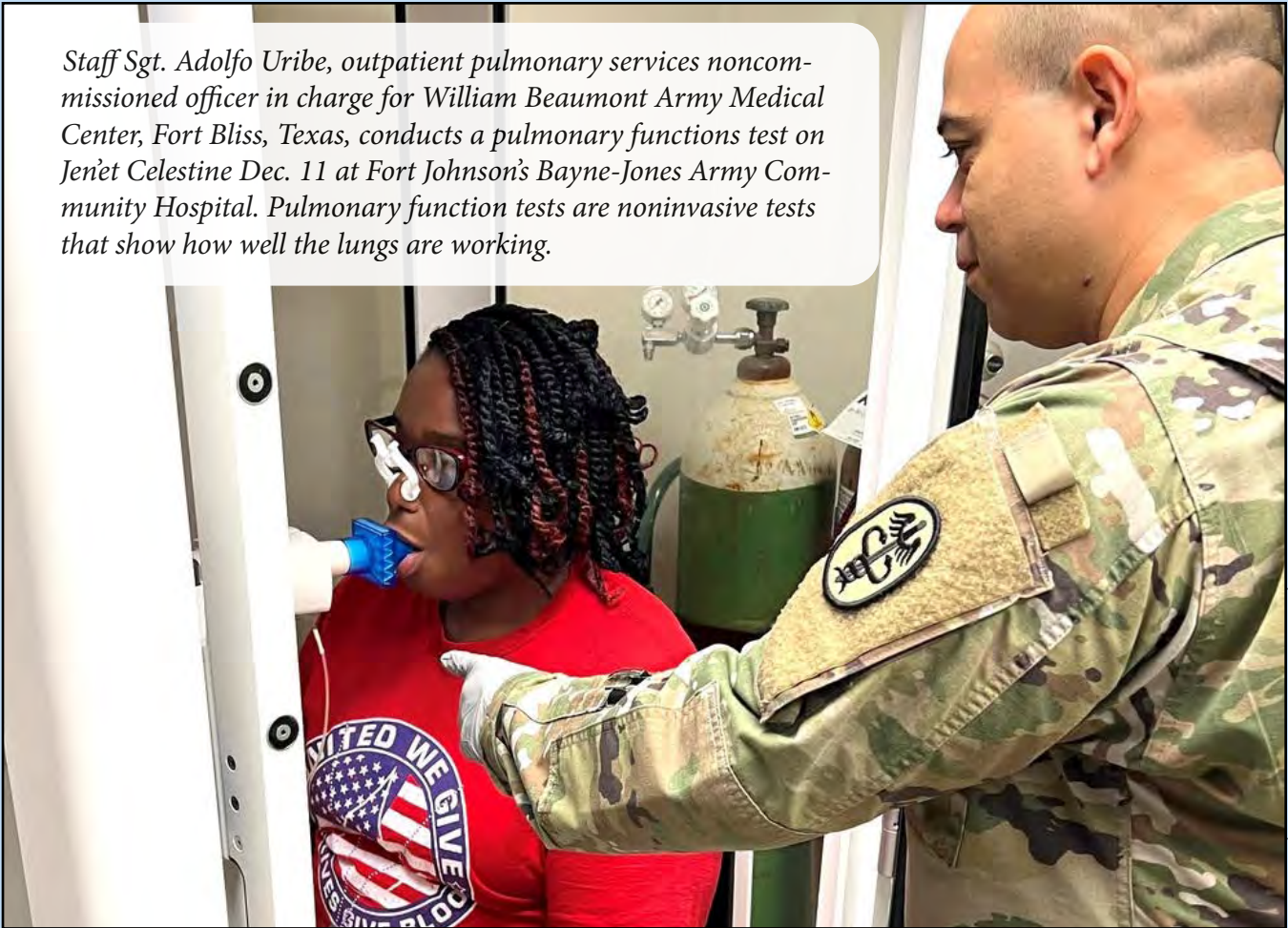
Col. Stephen Tanner, deputy commanding officer, WBAMC, said his military medical treatment facilities was happy to support the request.

“One of the strengths of the military health system is our ability to reach out across the enterprise to support each other in times of need,” Tanner said. “It is important that military treatment facilities support one another because we all go through periods of time when we have shortages of personnel due to a myriad of factors. Supporting each other in this manner helps us all meet the healthcare needs of our beneficiaries and aids in the health readiness of our service members and their Families.”

Capt. Kelvin Cook, chief of operations for BJACH, said partnerships like this with WBAMC illustrate the collaborative efforts MTFs have across the enterprise to ensure the best access and quality of care to beneficiaries.

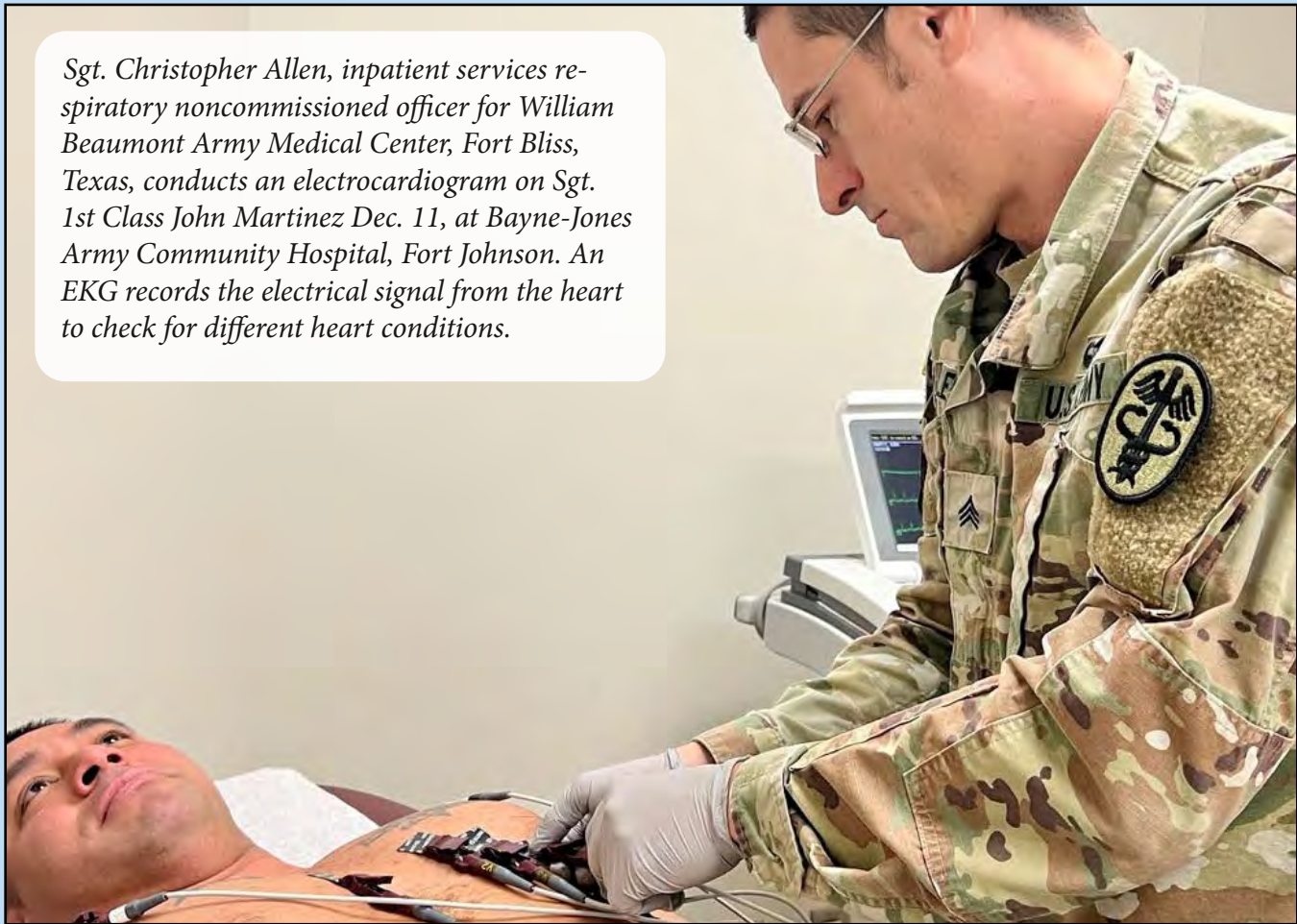
“Through shared resources our network is

Staff Sgt. Adolfo Uribe, outpatient pulmonary services non-commissioned officer in charge for William Beaumont Army Medical Center, Fort Bliss, Texas, conducts a pulmonary functions test on Jen’et Celestine Dec. 11 at Fort Johnson’s Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital. Pulmonary function tests are noninvasive tests that show how well the lungs are working.



JEAN CLAVETTE GRAVES/BJACH PAO

Sgt. Christopher Allen, inpatient services respiratory noncommissioned officer for William Beaumont Army Medical Center, Fort Bliss, Texas, conducts an electrocardiogram on Sgt. 1st Class John Martinez Dec. 11, at Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital, Fort Johnson. An EKG records the electrical signal from the heart to check for different heart conditions.



synced in providing top quality patient care under a joint model that ties together all mission partners,” Cook said. “While mission and requirements evolve and develop continuously, flexibility is key in managing our personnel assets. The ability for us to extend our personnel to other agencies and vice versa shows that the system is built to support and provide the best care to our beneficiaries.”

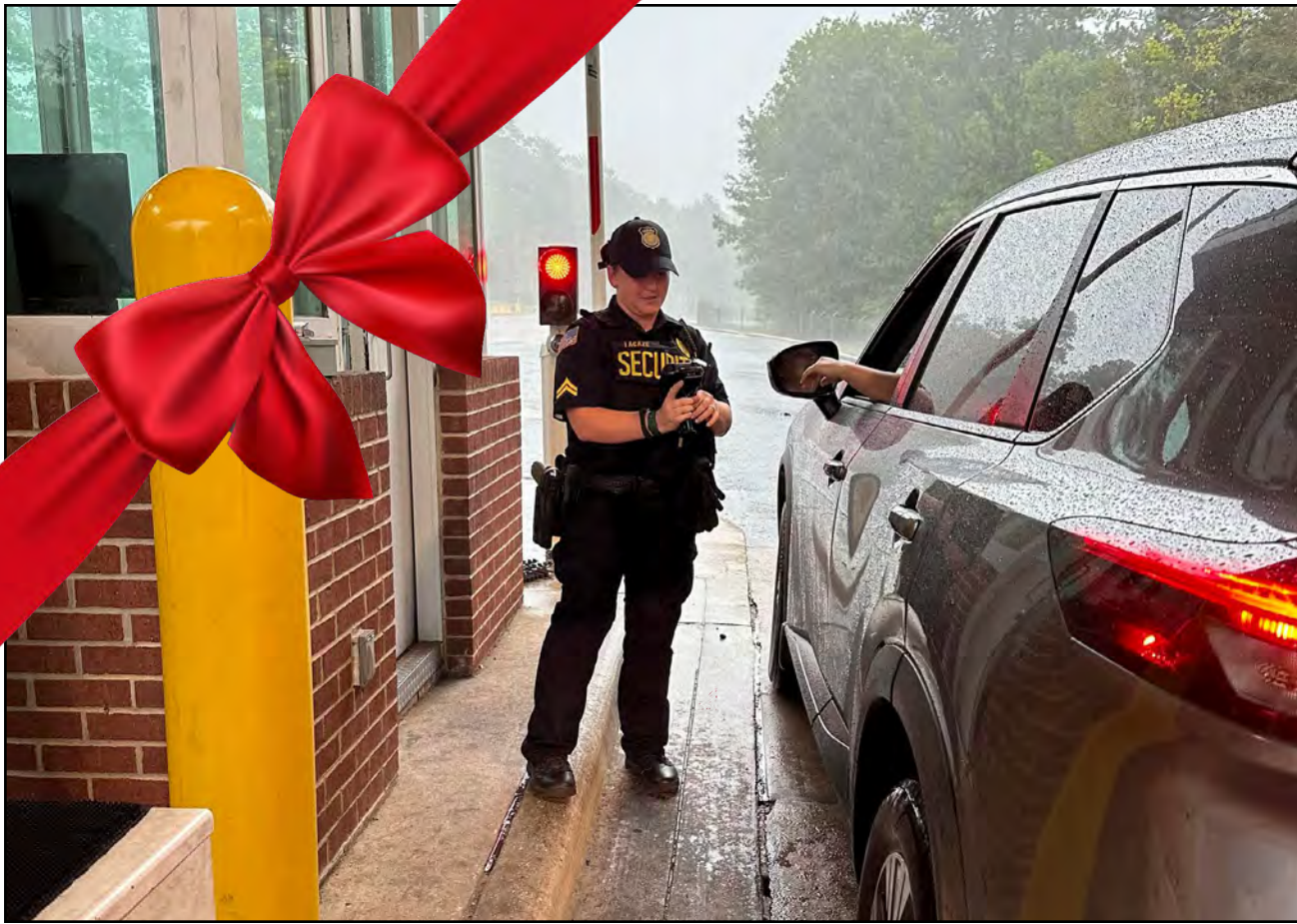
Cook said BJACH has and will continue to support backfill requests of medical doctors, biomedical maintenance specialists, behavioral health technicians, combat medics and more

for missions overseas and in the continental United States.

Charny said leveraging personnel assets is the key to success.

“We are all part of one healthcare network who serve the same population and we rely on each other to get through difficult times,” he said. “A portion of our staff is always at risk of deployment, training, or attending school away from the hospital. MTF collaboration during staffing shortages and mutual support is extremely important in maintaining good quality care for our patients.”





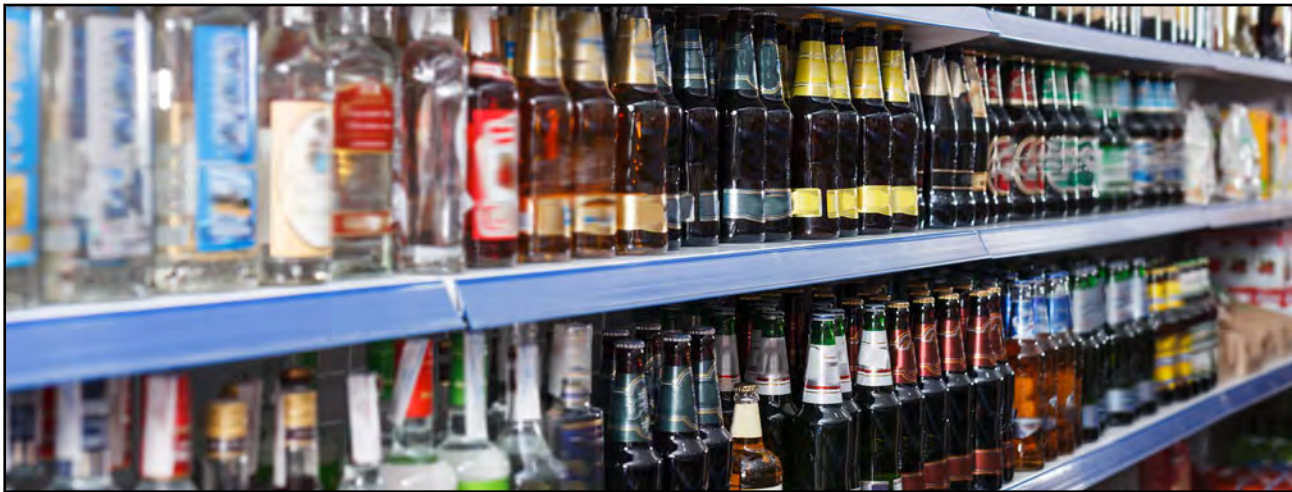
## Access control point holiday hours

The Fort Johnson Visitor Control Center and access control points 2 (Parkway Elementary), 5 (Post Office) and 6 (Chaffee Avenue) will be closed Dec. 23-26. They will resume normal operations Dec. 27.

The same locations will be closed Dec. 30-Jan. 2. They will resume normal operations Jan 3.

Personnel and their guests are encouraged to use either ACP 1 (main gate) or ACP 7 (Alligator Lake) during these closures.

Sponsors and visitors are encouraged to obtain passes prior to closures by visiting the VCC or using online pass request at [https://visit.gvt.us/steps/installation\\_selection](https://visit.gvt.us/steps/installation_selection). VCC standard hours are Monday-Friday from 5 a.m.-9 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Sponsors may also escort guests onto the installation if the sponsor has a DoD common access card, retiree card or dependent card and is 18 years or older. Finally, visitors with a valid driver license can be vetted for one-day access onto the installation, at ACP 1 or ACP 7.



## Prohibiting alcohol purchasing hours

Beginning Jan. 1, alcohol sales at the South Main Express will be prohibited during the hours of 10 p.m.-11 p.m. No other Fort Johnson retail outlets will be affected.

Starting in 2024, AAFES, which runs hundreds of retail outlets on Air Force and Army bases worldwide, will cut the hours it sells alcohol at all of its stores. Beer, wine and spirits will only be sold between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. at all Base Exchanges, Shoppettes, Express shops, Class Six and other stores run by AAFES.





# Check VIN numbers

The Directorate of Emergency Services Traffic Division will release the following vehicles to MWR for disposal if they remain unclaimed. Vehicles are listed with the last four of their VIN number. If one of these vehicles belongs to you, please contact the Fort Johnson Police Traffic Division at 337-531-1806, 6675 or 2675.

1994	Ford	F250	3432
1997	Dodge	1500	3720
2003	Nissan	Maxima	6157
2014	Chevrolet	Cruze	0491
2002	Pontiac	Grand Prix	1285
1995	Dodge	1500	8287
2016	Jeep	Patriot	9883
2005	Buick	LaSaber	7593
2005	Lincoln	LS	5385
2001	GMC	Yukon	6444
2010	Hyundai	Genesis	5409
2005	Long	Boat trailer	5162
Unknown	Unknown	Utility trailer	N/A
2007	Mitsubishi	Galant	9674
2000	Ford	Mustang	8551



## Are You Prepared?

You never know when you will encounter winter weather or an emergency road closure.

**Don't Let a Winter Storm Take You By Surprise!**

**Put a FREEZE on Cold Weather MISHAPS**

Emergency Supply Kit for Your Vehicle!

- Cellphone Charger
- First Aid Kit
- Jumper Cables
- Spare Tire and Tire Chains
- Flares or Signaling device
- Full Tank of Gas
- Sand or Kitty Litter
- Tow Strap
- Blankets
- Snow Shovel and Brush
- Flashlight
- Mittens, Hat, Boots, Warm Clothes
- Water and Snacks

 <https://safety.army.mil> 

## SPACE HEATER SAFETY

Fort Johnson Soldiers and Civilian employees, in accordance with Army Regulation 420-1, 22-12.b.(2), "Use of personal supplemental heating or mechanical cooling devices must have supervisor written approval and must only be used when the area is occupied."



- Check heater certifications
- Maintain your heater properly
- Keep the heater 3 feet away from anything that can burn
- When you leave the heater alone, turn it off and unplug it
- Don't try to warm anything but the room
- Don't combine heaters and moisture in any way
- Remember any ventilation requirements

**BE AWARE OF WHAT YOUR SPACE HEATER CAN COST YOU**



Call the Garrison Safety Office at 531-SAFE if you need a reminder



**RESIDENTS!**  
**Refer-A-Friend for \$750**

Open to Active-Duty, Retirees, DoD Civilians & General Public!

**Limited Time ONLY!**

Referred applicant must move in before February 01, 2024!

For additional details, please contact 337.537.5060

**Corvias**  
PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Corvias Leasing  
5309 Pryor Ct, Ft. Johnson, LA

Find us on   



# WINTER SAFETY TIPS

## TIP #1



### EMERGENCY WORK ORDER SUBMISSIONS:

**Corvias Housing:**  
866-436-2047

**Facilities**  
(Barracks, Motorpools,  
Dining Facilities, etc.):  
337-531-1379

**When freezing temperatures are expected, turn on your heat and set temperatures to at least 65 degrees.**

## TIP #2



**Follow these tips to keep your water pipes from freezing: set faucets to a slow drip; disconnect hoses attached to outdoor plumbing; open cabinet doors under kitchen and bathroom sinks and ensure you know where water shutoff valves are.**

## TIP #3



**Follow these tips to winterize your facilities: leave heat on in office/building; leave water dripping in facilities with exposed piping; check outside faucets and submit demand maintenance orders in case of need for wrapping exposed pipes and report any heat-related issues immediately.**



# Fort Johnson Solid Waste



## CONSOLIDATED SOLID WASTE COLLECTION POINT

MONDAY – FRIDAY | 0800 – 1530  
(337) 535 - 1155

### SOLID WASTE (SCRAP METAL AND WOOD DISPOSAL)

#### QRP/RECYCLING CENTER

Bldgs. 3620 & 3622 - Corner of Georgia and Maine Aves.

**MON-FRI 0800 -1600 (337) 531-7556**

• Organizations should turn-in scrap metal to the QRP facility.

#### 8300 BLOCK

**MON-FRI 0800 -1530 337-535-1155**

• Organizations should turn-in scrap wood to Solid Waste Consolidation Point (8300 block).

• Wood greater than 3 ft. long cannot be placed into the dumpsters.

• Don't place scrap wood next to dumpster.

• Used furniture/bulk items must be disposed of at the 8300 block.

• No hand receipt items.

### BULK ITEMS IN HOUSING DISPOSAL INFORMATION:

All residents living in South Fort & North Fort military housing are authorized to dispose of bulk items into the roll off located at Corvias Warehouse site marked "**RESIDENTIAL WASTE ONLY**". This is for "Housing Residents Only" not from barracks, Garrison entities or from off post. The site is located @ 6528 Holmlund Street next to the Dogwood "Bark Park". Operating hours are M-F 0800-1700.

### KEYS TO SOLID WASTE SUCCESS

- Keep dumpster lids and doors closed to comply with Louisiana regulations to avoid state action (Title 33, Part VII, ref. 507.D).
- Don't bury, burn, or dispose of waste in the field or garrison.
- Sort hazardous and regulated waste from inert waste at the point of generation.
- Purge refrigerators, ACs, and freezers with freon before disposal at QRP Recycling Center.

**Personal appliance DMOs are not accepted.**

### (FAQ) FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### How do I request a roll-off for a large amount of scrap wood and how long can my unit keep it?

Call (337) 535-1155 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. with your facility number or location, name, phone number. POC is responsible for items and other materials that are placed inside roll-off. Wood only. No trash or debris.

#### Where do I deliver scrap metal?

QRP recycling center, building 3620. Call (337) 531-7556 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

#### Can my unit dispose of bread racks in dumpsters from our field training exercises?

No. Deliver to building 4366 cold storage facility on Virginia Avenue for reuse.

#### Can my unit deliver used/damaged furniture to the CSWCP 8300 block?

Yes, but furniture must not be on the organization's hand receipt, and units must provide a detail to unload.

#### How does my unit request solid waste support for upcoming training or ranges?

Call (337) 535-1155 and provide unit name, POC, grid location or range number and dates needed.

#### Why didn't my unit or facility dumpsters didn't get serviced today?

The dumpster was blocked by a vehicle or equipment, too heavy from unauthorized items, had safety issues or contained a restricted item.

#### Where can my unit dispose of bags of leaves, pine straw, tree limbs and other yard waste from unit area cleanup?

The 8300 block on North Fort. All plastic bags must be emptied into the roll-off. For assistance call (337) 535-1155 Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

#### Where can I dispose of clean cardboard?

Any green dumpster, building 3620 (QRP) or building 830 north of the Thrift Shop (old commissary) parking area.







### Road work begins on Texas Avenue

Repairs to Texas Avenue are in progress. The project will require approximately nine months to complete. Phase one is approximately 45 days and will require the complete closure of the intersection of Texas and Pennsylvania avenues. Non-hazardous cargo and Non-commercial traffic are encouraged to use alternate routes such as 4th Street in advance of the closure. Commercial traffic, tactical traffic and hazardous cargo will be directed to follow the posted detour. The posted detour will be restricted during PT hours (6:30-8 a.m.). Plan movements before or after PT hours to avoid delays. Motorists should anticipate traffic delays. Pedestrians are encouraged to stay clear of the work zone.

## TALKING, TEXTING & DRIVING



Louisiana has a statewide ban on the use of wireless devices for writing, sending, or reading text-based communications while driving, regardless of age



The state of Louisiana currently does not have a full ban on cell phone use for all drivers. However, novice drivers under the age of 18 are prohibited from using a cell phone in any manner (talking, texting, playing games, etc.) while driving. Louisiana also has a texting while driving ban for all drivers. Violators could face a fine up to \$175 for a first offense or up to \$500 for subsequent offenses



If you're driving through a school zone during posted hours, it is against the law to use your cell phone or other mobile device for any reason, including:

- Making a phone call
- Texting
- Social networking





# Fort Johnson Soldier completes degree with ‘traditional’ college experience

## NORTHWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY

Darren Polk has had an unconventional academic career that included online classes, a U.S. Army deployment and getting married. But this past semester, he was able to be a man about campus at Northwestern State University, taking face-to-face classes and participating in student life. Polk graduated Dec. 14 with an Associate of General Studies degree.

A native of Pensacola, Florida, Polk joined the U.S. Army as an active-duty military police soldier in 2018, two years after graduating high school. After completing training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, he was stationed at Fort Johnson in the 204th Military Police Company. He is currently a staff sergeant and during his time in the Army has been around the U.S. for several military and training events.

Polk took online college courses through Purdue University Global, and in October 2020 he was deployed to the Middle East to support Operation Enduring Freedom.

“This entailed waking up at 3 a.m. for the hour seminars presented by my instructors,” he said. “Once I returned to Fort Johnson in July 2021, I took a break from school with the idea of continuing in the future. Once it came time for me to reenlist, I chose to take part in the college option that my battalion offers, where I am allowed to attend in-person classes for a single semester. During this time, my goal was to graduate so I could get the ‘full experience’ of college, and as it comes to a close, I’m thankful I chose this path.”

Polk took classes at NSU’s Leesville/Fort Johnson campus and the main campus in Natchitoches, attended football games and maintained good academic standing. His goal in completing the degree was to get the experience and stay competitive for his next promotion.

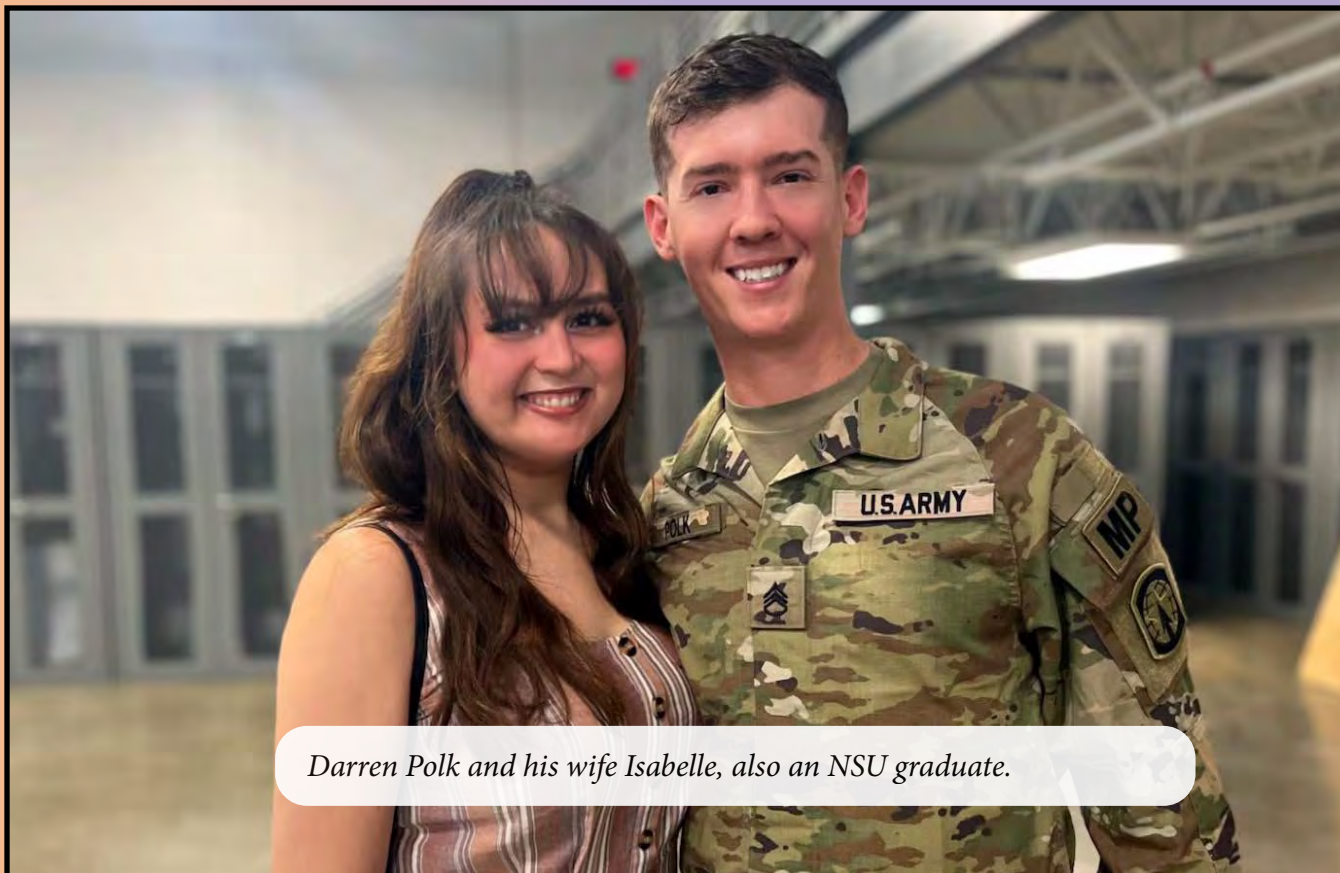
“My past platoon sergeant offered excellent advice leading up to me making the choice of going back to school and gave me the idea of going for a general studies degree that could be better used for branching off of instead of other degrees that people in my job over saturate,” he said.

“Darren never thought college would be in his cards, but after five years of service, he has become an accomplished E-6 with a degree to boast now,” said Isabelle, his wife of just over a year, who he met in Louisiana. “This semester at Northwestern has been a once in a lifetime experience because after graduating, Darren is to set off for recruitment orders. No matter where he ends up, Darren will carry on the spirit of Northwestern State University as an alumnus.”

Isabelle is a 2019 graduate of NSU where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology and a Bachelor of Arts in Fine and Graphic Art. She is employed at the National Center for Preservation Training on the Natchitoches campus.



*Darren Polk posing for a commemorative first day of class photo.*



*Darren Polk and his wife Isabelle, also an NSU graduate.*

Polk said he intends to eventually complete a bachelor’s degree.

“In October, I was selected to be a recruiter for the Army. So after graduation, I will go back to work and prepare to go to school and find out where me and my wife are going to be moving for that challenge,” he said. “I will, however, take a break while I go to recruiter school and settle in wherever we move to for

the assignment, but I will be back taking classes as soon as I can.

“Being able to attend college and go to the football games, walk around campus and just be a student is something coming out of high school I never imagined I’d have the opportunity to do it’s something a lot of people can’t do so I’d say this entire experience has been special.”





## College graduation

Fort Johnson's Combined College Graduation was held at the Bayou Theater Dec. 6. Congratulations to the graduates for their dedication and hard work.



## CALLING ALL VOLUNTEERS



JRTC and Fort Johnson DFMWR  
offers several volunteer opportunities

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING,  
OR NEEDING MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE  
CALL ACS AT 337.531.1941**

CHECK OUT

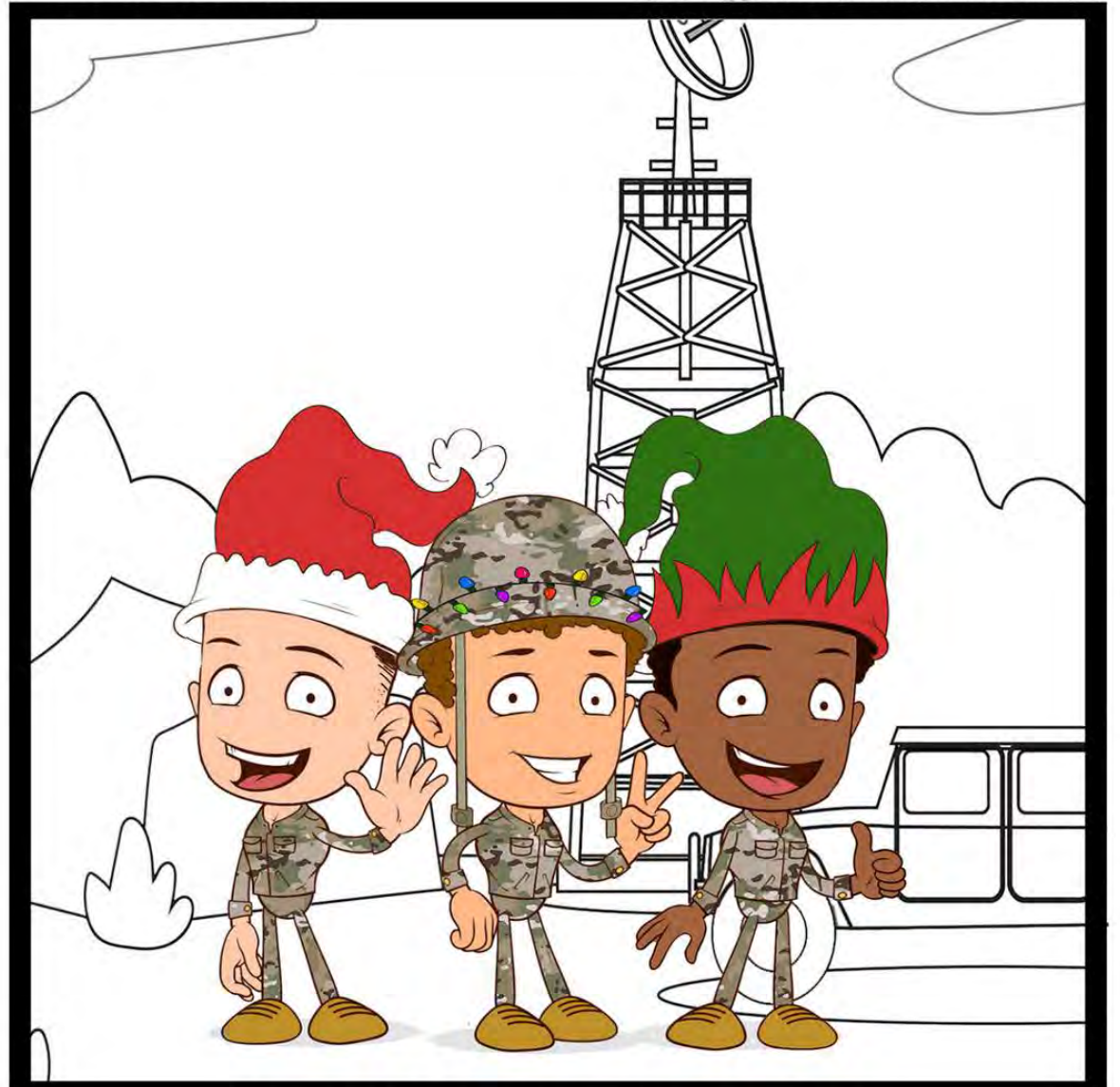
[HTTPS://VMIS.ARMYFAMILYWEBPORTAL.COM](https://vmis.armyfamilywebportal.com)

FOR ALL AVAILABLE POSITIONS



BY ALEX RIVERA

MELVIN'S MOMENTS



If you can't be with the family you love,  
love the family you're with.





# Recycle your Christmas tree!

**From Dec. 26–Jan. 3, Fort Johnson Environmental will be collecting discarded, live Christmas trees to improve wildlife habitat.**

The recycling center will have a 24-hour drop-off container for those who are able to bring their trees. Environmental will also drive around housing periodically collecting any trees put out on the curb.

*We ask that families please remove all tinsel, lights and ornaments from the trees.*

**For more information please contact  
[amy.c.brennan3.ctr@army.mil](mailto:amy.c.brennan3.ctr@army.mil).**

Located on the corner of Georgia Street and  
Maine Street at building 3620

## **3Rs (Recognize, Retreat, Report)** **Explosives Safety Education Program**

All individuals who discover abandoned, unattended or discarded ammunition and explosives, potential unexploded ordnance or a potential explosive hazard should use the Army's 3R process:

**1 – RECOGNIZE:** When you may have encountered a munition or potential unexploded ordnance and recognize it is dangerous

**2 – RETREAT:** Do not touch, move or disturb the munition or unexploded ordnance. Carefully leave the area, informing other personnel in the area of the situation and evacuating the area

**3 – REPORT:** Report any and all ammunition, explosives and suspected unexploded ordnances immediately to the Directorate of Emergency Services by dialing 531- COPS (2677) or 911. Report as much information as you can like location, description (size/color)



**Contact the Garrison Safety Office at  
531-SAFE (7233) for more information**





## Flu shots

Flu shots are available at BJACH for all beneficiaries 6 months and older Monday-Friday from 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

Call 337-531-3011 to schedule an appointment.

## BJACH lunch hours

The Bayne-Jones Army Community Hospital will have reduced hours for lunch Dec. 20.

## Buck competition

Ready, aim, fire! The Fort Johnson Shooting Range is hosting a big buck competition now until Jan. 31.

Categories include age ranges 5-10 years, 11-14 years, 15-17 years and 18+. One winner will be selected from each category. Hunters will measure their buck at one of three locations and submit their photos through the link below.

For more information call 337-353-0528.

<https://johnson.armymwr.com/happenings/>

## big-buck-competition

## Spring soccer registration

Got little ones interested in soccer? Now's the time to register them for the upcoming Child and Youth Services spring soccer! Registration is ongoing until Jan. 5.

For more information call 337-531-6004.

## Story time

Stop by Allen Memorial Library Dec. 19 at 11 a.m. for a winter wonderful story time! Christmas crafts will also be available for the little ones and their parents.

<https://johnson.armymwr.com/calendar/event/story-time-allen-memorial-library/5346894/63414>

## Golf scramble

Ring in the New Year on the green! Join Col. CJ Lopez for a fun game of four person scramble golf. Event takes place Jan. 5 at Warrior Hills Golf Course. Tee time swings off at 12 p.m.

<https://johnson.armymwr.com/calendar/event/garrison-commanders-golf-scramble/6224908/83163>

## scramble/6224908/83163

## Second Sunday brunch

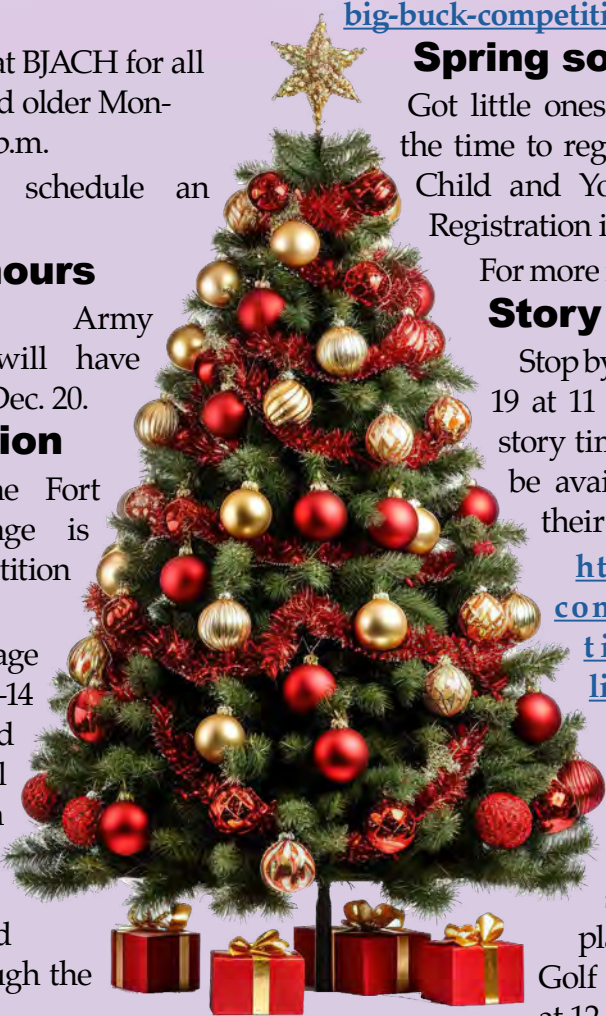
What better way to toast to 2024 than with mimosas and a delicious brunch? Join the Forge Bar & Grill Jan. 14 for their monthly second Sunday brunch. From 10 a.m.-2 p.m., guests can enjoy from a selection of French toast, omelettes, brunch cocktails and more.

<https://johnson.armymwr.com/calendar/event/second-sunday-brunch/6090081/81480>

## Pool tournament

Calling all parents and youth to the cue (ball)! Come out and join the Middle School and Teen Center, building 744, Jan. 5 at 5:30 p.m. for a night of billiards and fun.

<https://johnson.armymwr.com/calendar/event/parent-and-youth-pool-tournament-night/5933454/78102>



# FORT JOHNSON THINGS TO DO

## Dec. 13-28: The Running of the Christmas Trains 2023

### Lake Charles, La.

The magic of O gauge model railroading has returned to Sulphur. The Southwest Louisiana O Gauge Model Railroad Club is running its 35' x 20' modular layout at the Sulphur Regional Library, 1160 Cypress St., through Dec 28.

The club will run the trains for the public on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays from 1-5 p.m. and on Fridays and Saturdays from noon-5 p.m. There is no charge to view the trains.

<https://www.visitlakecharles.org/event/swla-ogauge-model-railroad-club-presents-the-running-of-the-christmas-trains-2023/44361/>

## Dec. 18-24: Christmas on the Ranch Leesville, La.

Get your ticket now and bundle the kiddos into the car for this Christmas lights drive-thru. Exciting lights galore with over a half a million lights, including a light show set to some of the most popular Christmas classics. Don't miss out on this great Christmas activity in one of the best holiday Leesville events!

<https://christmasontheranch.com/>

## Dec. 20: Coca-Cola Christmas Truck Night Monroe, La.

The annual Coca-Cola Christmas Truck Night is back at the Biedenharn Dec. 20! The 18-wheel Coca-Cola Truck will be decked out in lights and playing your favorite Christmas tunes. The Coke Polar Bear and the Grinch will both make special appearances. Food trucks will be serving up delicious meals for all to enjoy.

<https://www.monroe-westmonroe.org/events/coca-cola-christmas-truck-night/>

## Dec. 21-30: NOLA Christmas Fest New Orleans, La.

Experience a real indoor ice skating rink, ice slides, carnival rides, Santa and friends, gingerbread houses, special 10th anniversary events, and more!

[www.nolachristmasfest.com/](http://www.nolachristmasfest.com/)

## Dec. 23: Third Street Market Leesville, La.

Join us in Leesville each Saturday, from 8 a.m.-1 p.m. for fresh produce, homemade and handmade, as well as local crafts and gifts!

<https://www.facebook.com/leesvillemainstreet>

## Dec. 22: A Bluesy Christmas with DK Harrell Monroe, La.

Strauss Theatre Center is thrilled to announce "A Bluesy Christmas with DK Harrell," a one-night-only concert at 7 p.m. Dec. 22.

D.K. Harrell, a 25-year-old Blues sensation from Ruston, Louisiana, has rapidly made a name for himself in the music industry. In 2019, he had the honor of performing at the prestigious B.B. King symposium.

Tickets for "A Bluesy Christmas with DK Harrell" are on sale now and can be purchased at [strasustc.com/tickets](http://strasustc.com/tickets) or by calling the box office at 318-323-6681.

<https://strasustc.com/>

## Dec. 23: New Year's Eve Party Monroe, La.

Celebrate New Year's Eve at the Monroe VFW with Murphy's Law. They will have free fireworks throughout the evening with a free good luck meal at midnight and a champagne wagon for toasting! Tickets sell out fast, so get yours now! Tickets are \$25 and are nonrefundable.

<https://allevents.in/monroe/new-years-eve-party/200025877167600>

