



We Have Come A Long Way

By Ululani Packett

The Rubik's cube, boom boxes, Cabbage Patch kids, the Hacky Sack and those "Baby on Board" signs were the phenomenon, fads and trends of 1983. Also, the first non-American Disney theme park, Tokyo Disneyland, opened in Japan that year.

The U.S. Embassy in Beirut was bombed, killing 63 people; astronaut Sally Ride became the first American woman in space on the space shuttle Challenger; and Aviation became a separate Army branch.

Twenty-five years ago, most of our Soldiers were single, while today more than 63 percent of our Army is married. Then, it was about the "stay at home mom" – today it's more about dual-income families and many more single parents.

Family Readiness

To meet their needs, military child care facilities are now world class and provide some of the most progressive child development and care available in the country. Today, formalized family care plans are required and are crucial to ensure that children have adequate care when the military parent or parents deploy.

Many of our services and activities can no longer solely depend on volunteers, and more programs have to be funded.

What was once an informal coffee group is now the family readiness group (FRG), which functions as a communications system. Paid family readiness support assistants are on board to provide continuity to units, especially during deployments.

Even the virtual family readiness group, or vFRG, has a Web-based system developed to provide all of the functionality of a traditional FRG in an on-line setting designed to meet the needs of geographically dispersed units and families.

Twenty-five years ago there was no support group serving our children as

they moved from school to school; which left many parents to manage their education virtually without help.

Military Child Education Coalition

Today we are fortunate to have school liaison officers and the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), a nonprofit organization addressing educational needs and focused on transition issues for approximately 2,000,000 military connected children.

The MCEC has a goal of "leveling of the playing field" for these students as they transition from one community school to another.

Begun in 1997, MCEC now consists of a staff of professionals, working under a knowledgeable board of directors and a National Advisory Committee, which serves all branches of the military service, including the National Guard and Reserve components and their families.

Through extensive research, the MCEC staff has developed programs that make transitions easier and presents this during conferences, workshops, training and in numerous publications.

In September, MCEC staff member and trainer Linda Neault, came to Fort Rucker, Ala., to brief the senior leaders. She introduced the program to those who were not yet familiar with it. It opened many doors and we were anxious to get our community involved with the program.

Transition Counselor Institutes

The Transition Counselor Institutes (TCI) are a three-phase training program which follows curriculum developed and kept current by MCEC.

The purpose of the TCI series is to support the secondary school-age military student through understanding, accommodation, processes/procedures and protocols, networking, technologies, and communication.

Trainers are educators with experi-

ence in the secondary school arena, high school counselors, transition specialists, military parents, and others identified by MCEC and/or requested by the TCI Fellows and in cooperation with the military community.

Each TCI phase is a two-day, 12-hour training event that increases in complexity going from Level One: awareness, processes and networks; to Level Two: deeper understanding, social and emotional needs, and the military life; to Level Three: master transition counseling and partnerships with the installation.

Trainers are experienced in the strategies addressing the stresses of transition and issues that result from frequent moves. Aimed at counselors who serve our schools, Neault presented professional development training through the Interactive Counseling Center Phase I program.

It offers participants the option of receiving one hour of graduate credit at the guidance professional's expense and is available to all schools that support military installations.

On the second day of training, local high school students were invited to share their experiences, from moving around to the challenges of unmet academic needs, lack of extra-curricular activities, and fitting in and being accepted.

It was especially enlightening to hear from Mike Golden, a recent graduate from Virginia Tech and the son of promotable COL Walter and Jo Ann Golden, Fort Rucker's deputy commanding general.

Mike attended three different high schools, finishing his senior year in Germany, where he transitioned to meet the demands of Defense Department School System requirements in order to graduate.

What an eye-opener it was to some of the professionals and educators in attendance, who had no idea what these youngsters have to endure.

Student 2 Student

MCEC has identified several needs of transitioning students, to include: quickly receiving and being able to understand relevant information; the need for immediate positive peer relationships – someone to trust and talk with who can relate; and a compelling need to feel welcomed, accepted and understood.

MCEC provides training for students who are interested in their “Student 2 Student” program; where these students serve as ambassadors to welcome newcomers and give the support needed during their transition process.

Daleville High School (DHS) here in Alabama initiated a S2S program by sending Kevin Phipps, son of Fort Rucker chief of staff COL Warren and Sylvia Phipps, and Arianna Davis, daughter of Debbie and Greg Davis, a civilian family, to the training in San Antonio, Texas.

The S2S program trained two-member teams from eight schools across the nation on how to better welcome military students into a new environment – from showing them around the school to building a lasting friendship.

Our students have already briefed the local Chamber of Commerce and are in the process of setting up their program, encouraging community involvement, and training additional students to join their team.

In the near future, the team will receive a new computer, printer, scanner and web-camera which are paid for by MCEC.

With the new technology equipment and working with the Web-based Interactive Counseling Center, they will be able to communicate with incoming students before they even set foot in the school building.

Along with the technology, a link for the Student 2 Student program will be added to the DHS website. The link will allow students to access virtual tours and class scheduling information.

The capabilities could be endless in the team’s effort to make transitioning students more comfortable in their new surroundings.

Partners for the Future

We are fortunate to have MCEC serving our children and looking out for their education and their future,



COURTESY PHOTO

Helping military kids adjust to new school environments, Kevin Phipps, left, and Arianna Davis are members of the “Student 2 Student” support transition team at Daleville High School near Fort Rucker, Ala. S2S is an outreach program established by the Military Child Education Coalition to welcome newcomers changing school systems as a result of military moves.

and we are thrilled that Fort Rucker is involved in this worthwhile program. On behalf of our children, it is crucial that we support this program across all branches of the military.

MCEC is a registered non-profit, world-wide organization and a participant with the Combined Federal Campaign (organization donation code: 10261). More information is available by calling (254) 953-1923 or online at www.militarychild.org.

The outlook for the future looks bright, as many programs which affect our Soldiers and their families are being implemented and continually improved.

We have a wonderful and supportive community, and Fort Rucker continues to train many of the best and the brightest in the Army.

Our Soldiers – along with their families – continue to contribute by answering the call whenever and wherever necessary.

We have come a long way, and what a wonderful time to be celebrating 25 years as a branch!



Ululani Packett is the first lady of the Aviation Branch and the spouse of MG Virgil L. Packett II, commanding general of the U.S. Army Aviation Warfighting Center and Fort Rucker, Ala.