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DoD Celebrates Military Family Month in November

Nov 03, 2014

WASHINGTON, D.C. – November in America traditionally is a month of thankfulness, and the Defense Department chose this month to recognize those who support the nation's armed forces but who don't wear the uniform: military families.

Barbara Thompson directs the department's Office of Family Policy, Children and Youth, and Special Needs. She recently spoke with DoD News about Military Family Month and why it matters.

"In November, we take the time to draw attention to and highlight the great sacrifices and support that military families offer our men and women in the armed forces," she said.

Thompson's office oversees programs and policies that promote military families' well-being and quality of life. Thompson's portfolio covers a range of military family concerns, from child development programs to spouse career development, personal financial readiness and nonmedical counseling.

DoD Honors Military Families

Senior Pentagon officials will participate throughout the month in events designed to honor military families, Thompson said, and the military services, installations and family support centers also will be working to recognize military families.

"There will be a lot of events and special recognitions," she added.

Thompson noted that the modern military family mirrors the modern American family -- some families are blended, some have single parents, others consist of unmarried or same-sex couples, and still others have special needs.

"Just like the American family, we have all different shapes and sizes. ... They all comprise this fabric of military families," she said.

Families contribute to the U.S. military's strong, resilient and ready force and to their communities as well, Thompson said.

"When we think of our military members and the values that they embody, such as courage and duty and ethics and loyalty, those same attributes are key to our military family members," she noted.

Thompson said the department considers military families an integral part of the force.

"We like to say that military families serve, too," she said. "Because without the support ... that they provide the active-duty force and the reserve component force, it would be very difficult for service members to do their mission."

She continued, "I like to think that military families are right there, throughout the greatest

challenges as well as right there during the greatest triumphs of the service member."

Military Families Are Your Neighbors

The department can't be everything to everyone, she noted, "So we rely on the community assets where our service members and their families live -- whether the faith-based community or the school community."

Military families in communities across America typically live, shop, go to school and worship with their neighbors. According to recent statistics from the Defense Manpower Data Center, 61 percent of all service members live in off-base housing, and 70 percent of married troops live off base.

"So that community needs to recognize the sacrifices that military families make," Thompson said. She noted that November is "the perfect month for them to reach out and thank our military families for their sacrifice and what they do to support our nation."

"They have challenges such as caring for aging parents, they may have children with special needs, they relocate on a much more stringent schedule than their civilian counterparts, so children are changing schools and adapting to new environments," Thompson said. "And I think America at large needs to recognize that, and to reach out, and step up, and thank them for their service."

Read the original DoD news article here.