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Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers program leaders in Europe gather for training

By Ray Johnson

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SCHWETZINGEN, Germany -- More than 50 members of Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers programs in Europe attended training sessions here meant to enhance BOSS activities throughout the region.



RAY JOHNSON

U.S. Army Europe Command Sgt. Major Ralph Beam addresses participants during recent Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers training in Schwetzingen, German. Beam encouraged participants in the training to work more closely with leadership at mission units on BOSS initiatives.

The participants -- garrison program presidents; morale, welfare and recreation advisers; and installation senior military advisers -- gathered for a weeklong forum April 27-May 2 to share experiences and learn more in the areas of finance, event planning, marketing and hosting live entertainment.

The overall goal was to bring people together at one time in one place to strengthen existing programs, while exchanging ideas and getting a view of where the overall Army program is headed.

Mike Kreger, BOSS representative for the Installation Management Command-Europe, which has 17 garrison programs said the event went "very well."

"We sought feedback from everyone after each block of instruction," Kreger said. "The responses certainly added flavor and detail to material we provided."

BOSS, which started in 1989 and originated from the Army Family Action Plan, is centered on improving the quality of life for single and unaccompanied Soldiers by

raising well-being issues, providing recreation opportunities and ensuring community integration.

The program also serves as a leadership tool by setting “the conditions for junior Soldiers and noncommissioned officers to interact, ultimately enhancing mentorship and individual development,” said IMCOM-E Command Sgt. Major Tracey Anbiya.

At its core, BOSS serves as a voice for Soldiers while improving their lives and their communities.

Some examples of the progress of garrison BOSS programs in IMCOM-E include:

*U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden opened a lounge -- managed by BOSS members and Family and Morale, Welfare and recreation staff -- that offers, at no charge, use of Nintendo, Wii and Xbox video games, Wi-Fi connection, computers and large-screen televisions for watching movies. “It was built by the Soldier for the Soldier,” said garrison BOSS program president Spc. Kelsey Reed.

*USAG Ansbach sponsored 12 Days of Christmas activities, featuring a holiday party, free bowling, go-kart racing and trips to Munch, Nuremberg and Rothenberg. “There are more than 1,500 single Soldiers here,” said Jenny Sullivan, MWR adviser for the Ansbach program, “and they all have different hobbies. We try to offer everything from ski trips to concerts to volunteering with children. Plus we are almost finished completing a \$156,000 renovation project to our BOSS facility, which is scheduled to open in June.”

*USAG Kaiserslautern conducted a BOSS and Commissary Appreciation Day that provided a supermarket sweep offering participants 90 seconds to gather and keep as much food as possible for unit functions.

*USAG Schweinfurt ran an initiative, dubbed “This One's for You,” that included a series of recreational activities geared toward redeploying troops. Agencies such as Army Community Service and the Army Substance Abuse Program provided classes on a variety of topics, including alcohol awareness and family reconnection. The program was open to every Soldier facing difficulties in readjusting to normal life following 15 months in a combat zone.

*USAG Heidelberg participates in a monthly “Cheap Eats” dinner at which BOSS members, family readiness group volunteers and senior leadership gather for a meal that “allows us to speak with our chain of command and work through some issues,” said Spc. Megan Noles, BOSS president for Heidelberg.

Noles, who taught a class during the training on how to conduct meetings, said an update on the Army’s “I A.M. Strong” sexual harassment and assault prevention program was essential information that she will share with fellow young Soldiers, whether they participate in the BOSS program or not. The acronym I. A.M. stands for “Intervene, Act and Motivate.”

Going into the training, USAG Baumholder's Command Sgt. Maj. Earla Reddock said she expected much from the opportunity, "and it delivered ... it lived up to my expectations."

"First and foremost," she said, "meeting the BOSS presidents was extremely beneficial. These young noncommissioned officers and Soldiers are full of ideas on how to improve the program. Plus the MWR advisers shared their knowledge and experiences freely."

Asked what she gets out of BOSS as a senior enlisted adviser, Reddock replied: "I work for the Soldiers. I have a rare opportunity to watch them grow emotionally and mature into responsible young adults. I get to point them into the right direction. And sometimes, when I fix their problems, I get to be their hero."

By "fixing problems" the command sergeant major was referring to one of the three components of BOSS: quality of life, which continues to grow in importance as a foundation for the 20-year-old program.

Single and unaccompanied troops are encouraged to identify garrison-level and Armywide well-being issues and concerns that impact their quality of life. After being addressed during BOSS meetings throughout Europe, warranted issues are submitted through the senior military adviser (usually the garrison command sergeant major) for resolution via command channels or support agencies.

Issues that can not be resolved locally are submitted to installation AFAP forums -- where BOSS got its start -- and possibly all the way up the Army-level AFAP conference.

"Historically, because they are so visible and popular, it's been recreation and community activities that grab everyone's attention," said Spc. John Maki, the BOSS president for IMCOM-E. "But quality of life and well-being issues -- which impact morale just as well -- are moving to the forefront. And through BOSS, Soldiers can have a say in their living environment and personal satisfaction."

As part of the training here, two members from the Soldier and Community Recreation directorate delivered a presentation showing that in 2008 BOSS programs worldwide provided 158,973 volunteer hours, saving the Army more than \$3 million; ran 867 community service events; oversaw 868 recreation activities; and identified 174 quality of life issues.

"Obviously, BOSS program members, in Europe and throughout the service, are making a big difference," said Robert Lattanzi, chief of Army BOSS.

Lattanzi and Sgt. Maj. Tammy Coon, senior military adviser for community recreation, also highlighted some big-picture BOSS priorities: further engaging mission command sergeants major; updating online courses; establishing 47 full-time president positions;

and continuing partnerships with organizations such as Defense Commissary Agency, Army and Air Force Exchange Service, AFAP and family readiness groups.

“Having senior NCOs from the mission side become more involved in our program is so important to the future success of BOSS,” said Maki, a Stryker vehicle mechanic. “They understand what a valuable tool we can be in the reintegration process for redeploying Soldiers -- such as our participation in the Warrior Adventure Quest program.”

“And if we can get those permanent president positions approved, you will see BOSS grow even more,” he added. “Most of our program leaders are young Soldiers -- some of them first-termers -- who are doing this part-time, which is very difficult. If the proposal to have those permanent slots is approved, it would allow people to concentrate solely on BOSS duties ... and their entire focus will be on improving what they already have.”



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