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RELEASE #2009-08-18-1

2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

August 18, 2009

KONTAKT conference salutes those who strengthen German-American relationships

NUERNBERG, Germany -- U.S. Army Europe showed its appreciation for 40 years of continued support to Soldiers and host communities during the 24th annual KONTAKT conference here.

USAREUR is in transition, and KONTAKT Clubs are also changing to meet the needs of Americans across Germany, said Maj. Gen. Byron S. Bagby, USAREUR chief of staff, during an address at the conference's awards dinner.

The KONTAKT Club outreach program connects USAREUR Soldiers, Family members and civilian employees to host nation citizens in communities where the Army has -- or had -- a presence, the general said.

"What I find very special are the clubs that are active in communities where there are no more U.S. Army facilities," he said.

The KONTAKT program, established in 1969, brings American servicemembers, Family members, civilian employees and German citizens together to provide opportunities to learn each about other's countries and cultures. KONTAKT Clubs sponsor U.S.-German community events, provide educational programs and support Soldiers and their Families.

Membership in any of the 21 community-based groups is open to anyone willing to actively promote German-American friendship. The clubs operate under USAREUR guidance and German laws regarding nonprofit associations.

According to data from the USAREUR Public Affairs Office, there are currently about 2,000 KONTAKT members who provide approximately 80,000 volunteer hours annually to support stronger German-American relations through programs and special events reaching out to more than 800,000 people.

During the awards event, Bagby presented 14 group, five volunteer, 33 member and four event support awards. Eleven non-members received recognition for their service as well.

The Fulda club received the group high achievement award in category for community support at a community without a military presence. The club was also praised for its fundraising, marketing, public relations and education efforts.

The Fulda group was also recognized for its "push and pull" program that teaches young people living on former U.S. installations in their city the history of those kasernes and the Army's history in Fulda and Germany.

The Vilseck club received the high achievement award in the category for community support in a community with a military presence. It was recognized for its support of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment's single Soldiers with its "2SCR Welcome Home Program."

The Heidelberg club received praise for its cultural awareness programs and activities.

Several club supporters were also recognized for their individual achievements.

Jurgen Ullrich of Vilseck was honored for organizing special events and several barbecues and putting in 650 volunteer hours last year.

Renate Schwarzenberger of Hohenfels was saluted for making frequent visits to spouses of deployed Soldiers in the Vilseck, Grafenwoehr and Hohenfels communities and opening her home to Army Family members.

Lothar Gogolka was honored for his efforts in making the Grafenwoehr club one of the strongest in Germany, building relationships among the military and neighboring communities and increasing membership to more than 200.

For more information on KONTAKT Clubs across Germany, visit www.biknet.de.

Images of award recipients at the Nuernberg conference are available in the USAREUR gallery on flickr by visiting the USAREUR home page at www.hqusareur.army.mil and clicking the flickr link.



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