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SIMPLE GREEN PLASTIC PLATE SENDS MESSAGE TO V CORPS SOLDIERS TO GET INVOLVED WITH COMMUNITY

By Dave Melancon

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HEIDELBERG, Germany -- Family traditions, friendships and memories are something the movers do not haul away when an Army family makes a permanent change-of-station move.

The V Corps Special Troops Battalion Family Readiness Group made use of one family tradition to introduce new members into their fold during the group's first "Green Plate Welcome" at Patton Barracks here Oct. 9.

While stationed at Fort Leavenworth, Kan., in the early 1990s, Jill Connett, the STB FRG leader, gave a new neighbor some homemade cookies on a plastic green plate.

Through their years as neighbors, the green plate was passed back and forth between the families. Connett's neighbor's husband was killed in the attack on the Pentagon Sept. 11, 2001.

"That plate became very special to me, even though it is plastic," Connett said. Since then, every time she unpacked her household goods shipment after a move, the green plate would turn up, she said.



DAVE MELANCON

Lana Barshinger, V Corps Special Troop Battalion Family Readiness Support Assistant, chats with a family member in her office at Patton Barracks in Heidelberg, Germany shortly after the battalion Family Readiness Group's first "Green Plate Welcome" Oct. 9.

“I would unpack that plate and it would remind me that I need to get out and meet somebody and get to know them,” she said. “Do not waste time. Get out and meet somebody in your neighborhood.”

Although the disposable plates at the welcome event here were plastic, the message they sent was a strong one -- be part of the community and build new friendships, she said. “Come to the Green Plate Welcome and get to know your FRG. Get involved, and do not waste any time because you do not know what tomorrow will bring.”

The purpose of the Tuesday afternoon get-together was to introduce family members and single Soldiers to the battalion, its structure and key points of contact, she said.

“This just adds a personal touch,” Connett said.

Finding ways to get all members of the battalion involved with FRG activities and services does not start and finish with the green plates, said Lana Barshinger, the battalion’s family readiness support assistant.

There are monthly cooking classes in the unit’s barracks, she said. The FRG is also teaming up with the battalion Better Opportunity for Single Soldiers program to increase Soldier participation, she said.

“It’s a really unique thing,” she said. “A lot of people do not realize that single Soldiers are part of the FRG.”

The office is a focal point for the battalion’s estimated 750 Soldiers and 500 family members to learn about the unit, FRG events and the community, or just relax, she said.

“We tried to make it welcoming,” Barshinger said. “Soldiers and family members come in and just plop down on the couch.”

The foremost challenge facing unit leaders is getting accurate information out to its families, said Lt. Col. Ty Connett, battalion commander. FRGs are the battalion’s primary means of communicating with families.

“The Green Plate Welcome is unique, and is a good example of how we do things,” he said. “The more people who get involved, the more information is passed around.”

The next Green Plate Welcome is set for Nov. 13 at 11 a.m. in Room 117, Building 115, Patton Barracks. For information call 373-5218 or 06221-17-5218 or e-mail lanea.barashinger@eur.army.mil.



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