

Seminar helps to add to senior spouses' toolkits

Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College

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A senior spouse asks a question of the panel during the three-day Senior Spouse Leadership Seminar.

Today's military depends on strong, effective and caring leaders but those leaders are not always wearing a uniform as pointed out during a recent seminar held at the Army War

College.

65 senior spouses took part in the three-day Senior Spouse Leadership Seminar designed to provide them training to enhance their roles as program mentors and advisors and to provide them with relevant, useful information as they serve the military community, according to **Christine Yuengert**, head of the Military family Program. MFP sponsors the program along with the Carlisle Barracks Army Community Services office.

The seminar allows participants to discuss their "inherent" and "implied" roles as program advisors, mentors, and advocates," said Yuengert. Topics discussed included *Working with Volunteer Organizations; Coaching, Mentoring, and Advising; The Balancing Act: Taking Care of Yourself so you can Take Care of Others;* and *Protocol for Senior Spouses.*

"They have an opportunity to explore and refresh skills that can help make those roles more successful regardless of their component affiliation," she said.

"It is always beneficial to acquire another resource notebook to keep in my professional volunteer library," said Army Spouse **Kimberly McHugh**. "I have always encouraged others to be 'resource pack-rats' as well. Information and pro-activity makes for a stronger Army Family.

“My intention was to glean additional knowledge on expectations that may be held and hear experiences of senior spouses that have held leadership positions, specifically regarding Brigade Command,” said Army Spouse **B.J. Holman**. “I believe any opportunity to gather individuals together and share in a collaborative manner from their lived experience and knowledge is greatly beneficial.”

Holman pointed out one activity she feels will be especially useful in the future.

“I will definitely incorporate into my leadership position a very insightful activity called ‘catch phrase’,” she said. “The activity requires teams to identify encouraging phrases that can be produced from one or two letter words. For example, beef jerky was given and our group came up with the phrase ‘Thanks, you beefed up our strength on an enduring task.’ I always look for creative ways to incentivize volunteers. This along with others will be added to my pocketbook of care and concern.”

As part of the seminar a panel of Senior Spouses was assembled from the Carlisle Barracks and Army War College Community to offer their perspective of serving at the Senior Spouse level while their spouse served in Brigade or centrally selected Key Billet positions.

“In an open discussion format, panel members shared their experiences, insights and "lessons learned" with SSLS participants as this next wave of senior spouses prepares to serve as leaders, mentors, advisors in their future assignments,” said Yuengert.

The panel was facilitated by **Ginger Cucolo**, Senior Leader Spouse panelists included **Lisa Towery, Nellie Funk, Liz Beaudette, Beth Crutchfield, Ann Efflandt, Jennifer Frank, and Cynthia Maranian**.

“I think it is invaluable to the mission of supporting our Soldiers to provide learning opportunities to our Army spouses,” said McHugh. “There is such a wide-range of experience levels in the volunteer pool that it is always beneficial to educate us to available resources and programming. An informed Army Family is a Mission Ready Army Family.”