

Ground broken for the Sgt. Andrew McConnell Youth Center

By Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College

Ground broken for the Sgt. Andrew McConnell Youth Center



Col. Scott, Kathy and Amelia McConnell unveil the sign for the Sergeant Andrew McConnell Youth Center during the groundbreaking ceremony May 7. The \$6 million, 20,000 square foot facility is named in honor of Sgt. McConnell who was killed in Afghanistan in 2009.

For more photos visit

www.facebook.com/usawc

A fallen Solider, father, son, student, friend, and Carlisle Barracks community member was honored and remembered during a ground breaking ceremony for a new Youth Center here May 7.

In front of friends, family and the Carlisle Barracks community, **Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo**, Army WarCollege Commandant,hosted the ground breaking ceremony for the **Sergeant Andrew McConnell Youth Center**. The \$6 million, 20,000 square foot facility is named in honor of Sgt. McConnell, the son of **Col. Scott and Kathy McConnell**, who was killed in Afghanistan in 2009.

“It’s truly an honor for this facility to be named in honor of our son,” said Col. McConnell. “My son would be humbled by this. It ensures that his name will live on.”

Cucolo echoed the sentiment before sharing the story of Sgt. Andrew McConnell.

“Taking an honorable and useful place in the lexicon of Armed Forces Families who live and work at Carlisle Barracks will be the name McConnell,” said Cucolo. “Andrew’s story will be told over and over again, because when you walk into this beautiful facility you will see his picture... and several generations of parents and children, especially the Army kids, will learn that United States Army Sergeant Andrew Harron McConnell, for whom this center will be dedicated and named, was an Army

kid too.”

As an Army Brat, Andrew moved eleven times and attended seven different schools. While his father was a student at The War College, Andrew was employed by the Carlisle Barracks Sports Office where he, as he did with everyone he encountered, left an indelible impression, said Cucolo.

Answering a burning desire to serve his country, Andrew enlisted in the Infantry in October 2005, when he knew the country was deeply engaged in two wars.

“He volunteered knowing full well he would go into harm’s way,” said Cucolo.



Maj. Gen. Tony Cucolo, Army War College Commandant, Mel Irwin, Carlisle Barracks Children and Youth Services director, a representative from Atlantic Marine Construction, Amelia McConnell, Command Sgt. Maj. Robert Blakey and Lt. Col. William McDonough, garrison commander, break ground for the new facility.

He arrived at Fort Lewis, Wash., as a Specialist and was assigned to 2-1 Infantry, 5-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team. While at Fort Lewis, Andrew met and dated **Sarah Marie Ficks** and they married in December 2008. In July 2009, Andrew deployed as an infantry squad leader in B Company, 2-1 Infantry to Afghanistan.

Six weeks into his deployment, while conducting an early morning, mounted patrol, his Stryker vehicle struck a roadside bomb. The blast killed Andrew and his Platoon Leader, **1st Lt. David Wright**, and wounded several members of his squad. Andrew was interred at Tahoma National Cemetery in Kent, Wash.

“The level of sacrifice offered by Andrew will sink in to those who read on and find out that five months after his death, Sarah gave birth to his daughter, **Evelyn Mae**. In addition to his wife and daughter, Andrew left behind his parents, five sisters, **Ashlee, Amanda, Alecia, Abbey, and Amelia**, and an abundance of friends and coworkers.

Pennsylvania Senator Pat Toomey, who was unable to attend, shared his thoughts on Andrew’s sacrifice with a letter that was read at the ceremony.

“Recognizing the service of the men and women that have served this country in time of combat, and particularly those that have made the ultimate sacrifice, is a tradition that I take a great deal of pride in. I am deeply appreciative that the Carlisle Barracks and Maj. Gen. Anthony Cucolo have decided to name the new Youth Center on campus in honor of Sgt. McConnell.”

“While I never had the honor of meeting Sgt. McConnell, I have come to understand that, in addition to serving his country, Sgt. McConnell was an outstanding athlete and was involved in various community-based organizations. In many cases, the values an individual learns as a result of being involved in ventures such as this are directly in line with the goals of a Youth Center. With this in mind, I believe that naming the Carlisle Barracks Youth Center in honor of Sgt. McConnell a fine and fitting tribute.”

“The Carlisle Barracks Youth Center bearing Sgt. McConnell’s name will serve as an enduring tribute to his life and bravery in combat. Moreover, the Youth Center will provide local children with a venue for learning virtues that Sgt. McConnell proudly possessed and displayed on a daily basis.”

The ground breaking marks the beginning of the end for a project that has been more than 10 years in the making. Along the way, YS youth have helped plan the features that others would enjoy, like the demonstration kitchen for cooking classes, the full-size gym and patio. The gym will have a sport court that can be used, interchangeably, for roller-skating, roller hockey, and basketball, according to **Liz Knouse**, DFMWR director.

The Youth Center will be adjacent to the Moore Child Development Center, creating a one-stop center for family access to the YS, CDC, and sports fields.

“Now I know right now to you it’s just a fenced-in grassy area with a bunch of sticks in the ground, but I want you to use your imagination and picture a sprawling 20,000 square foot, state-of-the-art facility, a 21st century Boys and Girls Club, if you will,” said Cucolo. “A new building and in these tough financial times, that is tangible, visible evidence of the Army’s Covenant with its Families.”

Cucolo said that the naming of the center will hopefully serve as a reminder for all that pass through.

“Andrew is still serving us here, his memory will live on and be vivid and strong because as thousands of parents, children and staff pass by his picture and know why we name this building after U.S. Army Sergeant Andrew Harron McConnell, he will remind us not to take life for granted and better yet, he will quietly urge us all to live a life worthy of his sacrifice,” he said.

Youth Services has occupied its current facility since the 1990s. The YS building at 637 Liggett Road was built in 1940 and has served as a bowling alley and headquarters building. Youth Services has used it since the 1990s, and parents and youth have given it art and character, but couldn't overcome underlying challenges.

“The heating, ventilation and air conditioning units are beyond their useful life span,” said **Tom Kelly**, public works director. “We have had to install window air conditioning to supplement the current system. As a whole the entire facility needs to be modernized.”

Construction by Atlantic Marine Construction is expected to last approximately 12 months.

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 07 May 2013