

Year 58: Army War College students bring holiday cheer to more locations, more Seniors

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A decades-long holiday tradition continues this year. Since 1956, the Army War College and Carlisle Barracks sponsored a Senior Citizens Holiday Social on post – and this year, War College students are bringing the holiday cheer to the area nursing homes.

The Holiday Senior Socials will bring song, games, conversation, and a change-of-pace to all the residents and staff of 10 seniors' nursing and retirement centers, to include the Lebanon VA Medical Center.

"This year the format will change to a concept that will allow Army War College students to tailor events to those specific care centers and provides the ability to reach and contact more care facility residents," said USAWC student Army Lt. Col. Kyle 'Rudy' Riedel, who is coordinating the students' Senior Social project. All 24 student seminars are participating in this long-standing tradition; some are collaborating with other seminars for a better effort with the homes.

When students of USAWC seminars 6, 7 and 8 visited the Claremont Nursing and Rehabilitation Center Dec. 3, they participated in holiday gatherings in the recreation room, the dining facility, and the Alzheimer's ward.

Melissa Halstead visited the residents at Claremont. "I recommend that future classes follow this distributed model to engage more senior citizens," she said later.

The annual holiday social for senior citizens started in December 1956, when members of the Carlisle Barracks Women's Guild invited 50 residents from Carlisle-area nursing homes to the officers' club on post to celebrate the holiday season.

The concept evolved through time from the original Christmas Tea to the Senior Citizens' Holiday Social at the club, but this year's class was thinking bigger.

"It sounds like we will reach a lot of people," said USAWC Prof. Bill Lord, who has volunteered for the Senior Holiday Social since 1991. His participation reflects the personal attention incorporated into the event: he served as a personal escort to senior citizens, valet parking, coordinated directly with a nursing home activity coordinator, and since 2000 managed the photo operation that put a holiday photo with Santa into every guest's hand – along with the holiday cookies to go.

The new Senior Socials preserved the spirit, one-on-one conversations, and the holiday photo keepsake. The plan is to provide a framed photo of senior resident and USAWC service member for each visit, which includes room-to-room visits.

Army War College students are visiting these nursing and retirement homes through the month of December:

Chapel Pointe
Church of God Home
Claremont Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
Cumberland Crossings
Forest Park Health Center
Green Ridge Village Retirement Center
Manor Care Nursing and Rehabilitation Center
Sara Todd Home
Thornwald Home
Lebanon VA Medical Center