



# Reservists, Families Attend Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Event

By Lisa Ferdinando

Army News Service

**C**radling their four-month-old son who seemed to be the center of everyone's attention, military spouse Mercedes Beekley was glad she attended a Yellow Ribbon Program event with her citizen-Soldier husband.

"It's really nice to see all the families here together and know you're not alone," said Beekley, whose husband, Army Reserve Spc. James Beekley, was deployed for nearly a year.

The two, who were married when Beekley was home on leave during his 2011-2012 deployment, were among the more than 700 people who attended the two-day event for reserve-component members and their families.

"It's very informative," said Spc. Beekley, noting it was a great way for Soldiers to get information on a wide range of topics and to meet other service members.

The Army Reserve's 99th Regional Support Command, based at Fort Dix, N.J., hosted the event July 13-14 at Maryland's National Harbor, just outside Washington, D.C.

The program addressed deployment issues and dis-

cussed support and benefits available during all phases of deployment.

Sgt. Geneise Lucas said she is preparing for a possible deployment.

"I have been deployed before, and if I go with my unit, this will be my second deployment," she said. "It definitely feels good to be around others like me."

Experts were on hand to speak on a range of issues, including financial planning, suicide prevention, brain injuries, post-traumatic stress, family readiness, employer support, legal rights and education and health benefits.

Lt. Gen. Jeffrey W. Talley, the senior leader for the Army Reserve, told a session for family members that he understands the worries that parents have while their child is deployed; his youngest son is currently on his second combat tour of Afghanistan.

"Every day when I look at what we are doing for our Soldiers, I don't look at it as a general, I look at it as a parent," he said.

The Yellow Ribbon Program highlights the important role and sacrifices that families make and the critical role



Mercedes Beekley, Army Reserve Spc. James Beekley, and their four-month-old son Nicholas attend the 99th Regional Support Command's Yellow Ribbon Program event July 13 at Maryland's National Harbor. (Army News Service)

they play in supporting Soldiers, Talley said.

“The most important message is to say ‘thank you,’” he said, noting that he and his wife of 31 years, Linda, have moved 24 times, and she has calculated that he has been away from home for six-and-a-half years during his military career.

“At the end of the day, I can only do what I do as a Soldier because I have a great spouse and a great family, and as a traditional Reservist, a great employer that supports me,” Talley said.

The Yellow Ribbon Program significantly boosts morale, is a great retention tool and an important way to help Soldiers adjust, whether they are about to leave or have already deployed, said Maj. Gen. William D. R. Waff, commanding general of the 99th Regional Support Command.

“This really helps them set the stage going out the door and then when they come back, just making sure all those loose ends are tied up and any questions or issues are resolved,” he said.

The Yellow Ribbon Reintegration Program was established by Congress to address the unique needs of National Guard and Reserve members who deploy and to provide information about the range of resources available to them.

Yellow Ribbon events are open to all eligible reserve-component members and their dependents or designated guests.

The event at National Harbor was truly an inclusive event for the Reserve component, said Waff, since it included members of the Army National Guard and the Air National Guard, and a Coast Guard family.

“We’re really reaching out across the board to try to get all of our service members taken care of from the Reserve components,” he said.

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