

Sergeants Major Course Students, Spouses Spruce Up Junior Enlisted Family Center As Class 66's Legacy Project

By Jonathan (Jay) Koester - NCO Journal

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Class 66 at the U.S. Sergeants Major Academy has chosen to revamp Fort Bliss' Junior Enlisted Family Center as its legacy project, and the students' spouses have been leading the way.

Mike Menold was elected by his Family Readiness Group to lead the project along with fellow spouse Darlene Carlan. Menold and Carlan attended the first Spouse Leadership Development Course offered this year at USASMA. The project has allowed them to put into use the networking and leadership skills they gained in the course, Menold said.

The JEFC, run by the Armed Services YMCA, is a place where Soldiers of sergeant rank and below and their families can come for free food, housewares, clothing, books and furniture. They are also welcome to borrow ballgowns for formal occasions.



Before, junior enlisted and their families had to pick through piles of donated clothing, such as the one above, in order to find what they needed. “That is not an image you want to see,” said Mike Menold, the project lead. (Photo by Meghan Portillo / NCO Journal)

“Our commitment was to make it a friendlier environment for the junior enlisted,” Menold said. “Before, they used to walk in through the back door past mounds and mounds of donated goods, and they would be literally picking through the piles to see what was there for them. That is not an image you want to see. By having the clothing sales store – we call it clothing sales even though everything is free – set up like a boutique with clothing racks that we keep refreshing from the back stock room, it makes them want to come back.”

The JEFC is open Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays from noon to 4 p.m. Junior enlisted Soldiers and their families may choose up to 10 free items each day, or up to 30 each week. There is a waiting list for larger items such as couches, tables and appliances.





Mike Menold was elected, along with Darlene Carlan, by their Family Readiness Group to lead the project. Menold and Carlan attended the first Spouse Leadership Development Course offered this year at the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy. (Photo by Meghan Portillo / NCO Journal)

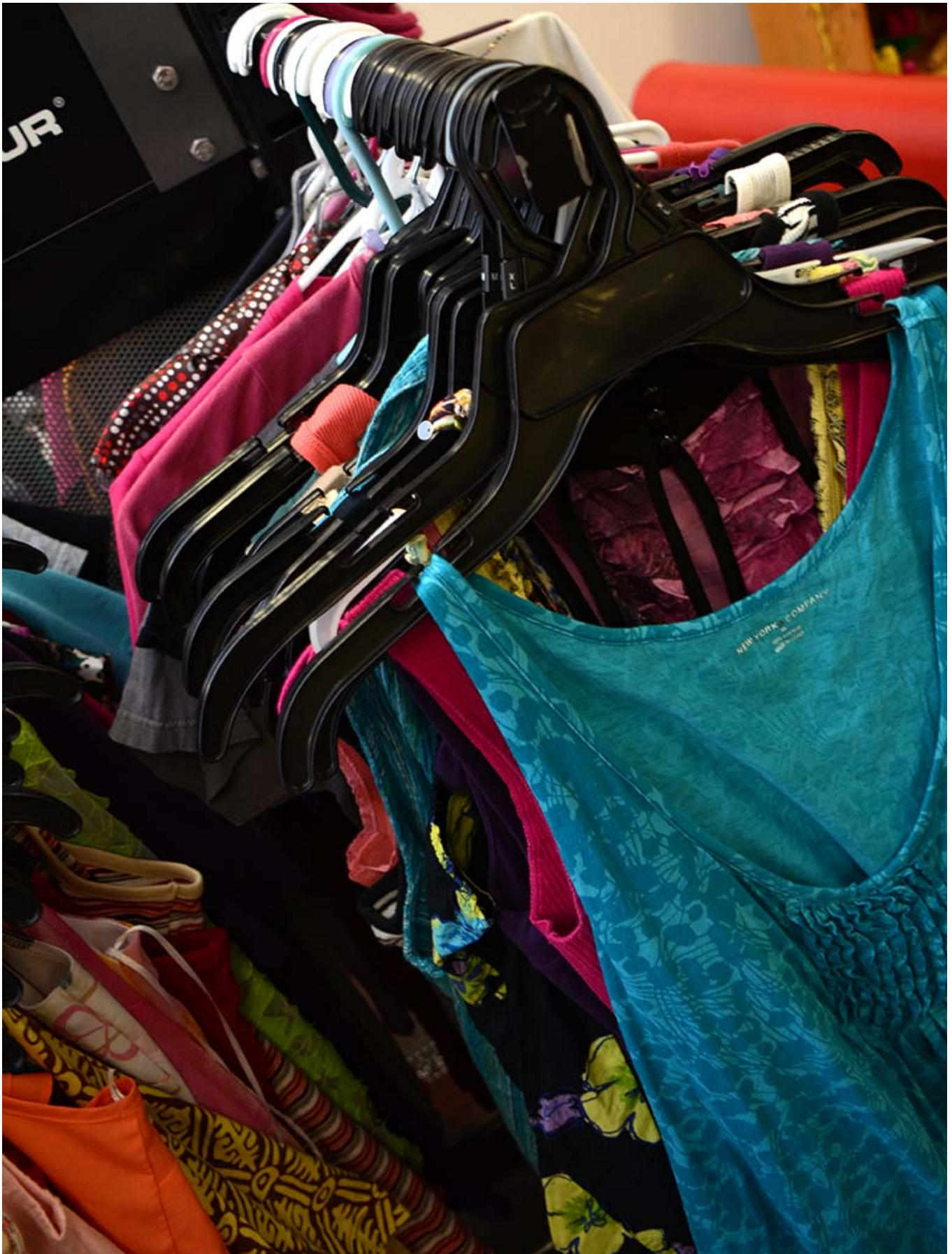
“It was a mess before,” said retired Command Sgt. Maj. Tedd Pritchard, the executive director of the ASYMCA at Fort Bliss. “The spouses and the Soldiers really did so much to make the place welcoming to the junior enlisted and their families when they come in. We are so grateful for their time and their hard work.”

A large part of an NCO’s life is dedicated to taking care of Soldiers and their families, and this legacy project reflects that dedication, said Pritchard, who was USASMA’s deputy commandant before retiring and taking his position at the ASYMCA.

“It helps them financially,” said Nicole Range, the JEFC program coordinator. “Some come in here for baby items or to get uniforms when their kids go back to school. I saw one little one come in here without shoes on – the mom said they had broken. There weren’t any that fit her son on the shelf, but I was able to find a pair in the back that were the right size. She was so happy. People really appreciate this. It helps. I hope more senior NCOs will take notice of this place and send their Soldiers our way when they see they are in need.”

Based on the amount of food available, the JEFC will help out families in need as much as possible. It is much better to move the food than to have it sitting on the shelf, Menold said.





The goal of the legacy project was to make the JEFC a welcoming place for junior enlisted Soldiers and their families to come and find what they need. (Photo by Meghan Portillo / NCO Journal)

“Before, they didn’t have a process to handle their inventory or move the product out,” Menold said. “Some of the food was two years past the expiration date. We dumped about a ton and a half of food and outsourced almost two tons of food that was on short date that wouldn’t move through here quickly enough. So we got it out to soup kitchens, where it would be used right away. We started a network for them. We are not only giving them a nice new beautification of the building, we are giving them a whole new process of how to manage the system. I had USASMA students writing inventory programs for me, running the wires for the monitoring system. Students came in and painted all these walls.”

To make the JEFC a more family-friendly environment, the Soldiers and spouses set up a play area in the corner where kids can keep busy while mom and dad shop. They also built a changing room with a full-length mirror so visitors can try on clothes to see if they fit.

Before, junior enlisted Soldiers had to come through the back door or walk through the Fort Bliss Officer and Civilian Spouses’ thrift shop to access the JEFC. Now, they have their own entrance. They walk in to see housewares neatly displayed. Books and movies line the shelves, and in a larger room men’s, women’s and children’s clothing is organized and hung on racks donated by Under Armour and other stores on post.



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come for free food, housewares, clothing, books and furniture. (Photo by Meghan Portillo / NCO Journal)

“As USASMA spouses, we are only here until graduation in June, and part of the continuity that we want to leave is more than just a legacy project,” Menold said. “We hope other spouses can get involved and volunteer here. The hardest part is turnover of volunteers and controlling the stock. There is always more for the spouses to do.

“When you think about who the junior enlisted Soldiers are — they are the lowest paid of all the armed service branches, and yet they are the very tip of our fighting force’s spear,” he said. “They are the ones dedicating the most, and we can give them more support through the ASYMCA. That’s why I am so passionate about being involved here.”



Sergeants Major Course students and their spouses beautified Fort Bliss’ Junior Enlisted Family Center as the legacy project for Class 66. (Photo by Meghan Portillo / NCO Journal)