

# New program offers spouses keys to assistance

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3rd Wing Public Affairs

Are you the spouse of a deployed member? Are you constantly wondering what's going on and how to get information? Would you like to participate in a program that helps others get information?

A new program at Elmendorf, the Key Spouse Program, helps spouses serve as liaisons between military units and families.

Acquiring unit-specific information when the active-duty spouse is deployed is a common concern among many military spouses, said Mrs. Lori Hoffman, Family Support Center Key Spouse Program coordinator.

The Key Spouse Program is an outreach effort of the Air Force. Individual squadrons work with the Family Support Center to obtain and train volunteer spouses to help address concerns of the families of deployed members. Most units have one or more key spouses and they coordinate and disseminate information and support.

The program complements the Enlisted Spouses of Elmendorf Alaska and the Elmendorf Officers' Spouses Organization.

"ESPEAK and the EOSO are organizations that bring folks together and do volunteer work and charity work around the base and also provide information to the families," said Col. Michael Snodgrass, 3rd Wing commander. "We can't have too many ways of dispersing information. These three functions will greatly enhance each other's ability to do that."

Veteran military spouses and new military spouses, can benefit greatly from a variety of support networks, said Mrs. Hoffman.

"Many of our Air Force families have been through deployments before, but in today's world, deployments are very different. Families and spouses are relying heavily on their peers for

support. The Key Spouse Program utilizes peers to provide deployment support. You can bet that when you are talking to a key spouse, you are talking to a person who has gone through some of the same experiences you have," she said.

The Key Spouse Program, though complementary, is different from traditional spouse's groups because the key spouse is directly associated with the unit commander, and therefore empowered by organizational leadership.

"This benefits the commanders as well as the spouses. I believe a lot of the spouses would volunteer to help in passing out information and keeping in touch with the families if they knew how," said Col. Snodgrass. "This program allows the commanders an additional avenue to get information out to the families."

"By training the key spouses, we're able to promote better family readiness and a more efficient communication link between the unit and the family," added

Mrs. Hoffman. "With this program, I believe many of the non-emergency issues the first sergeants deal with will taper off. Of course, the squadron is busy focusing on the mission. In that way, key spouses help the squadron by taking some of the phone calls the first sergeants or commanders would get."

The training the Key Spouse Program provides allows the key spouse to deal with many issues and concerns, including loneliness, decision making, finances, and knowledge of community resources.

"There is a great need for these types of programs," said Dr. Bobbie Snodgrass, Col. Snodgrass' wife and program participant. "This is such an important program. With the increased deployments and Air Expeditionary Force rotations, it is our duty to ensure we care for our family members left here at home."

Key spouses share information about base policy changes, upcoming unit functions, deployment issues and support services with fellow unit spouses through newsletters, e-mails and phone calls. Key spouses also add a personal touch to

their communications by checking in on families of deployed members to ensure all is well on the home front.

Performing key spouse duties isn't a role for everyone, Mrs. Hoffman said.

Key spouses are interviewed and selected by unit first sergeants and commanders to ensure they can effectively represent the unit in their role of providing

communication, inspiring unit cohesion and sharing community information. Key spouses also attend monthly training meetings to learn about base help agencies and to gain situational awareness. This way, they're prepared to share information on sensitive topics such as force protection, stress management, family care and financial assistance.

To find out more about being a key spouse or who your key spouse is, check with your unit commander, first sergeant, or call the Family Support Center at 552-8629 or 552-4943.

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**Col. Michael Snodgrass**  
3rd Wing commander