



United Through *Community*



Vice President, Member & Field Relations: **KARI VOLIVA** • Senior Manager, Community Outreach: **CHRISTINE BROWN** • Contract Creative Director: **LYNDSEY AKERS, AKERS & CO** • Contract Graphic Design: **JENN MONTGOMERY, JEMOY CREATIVE** • Content Development: **SAVANNAH STEPHENS**



THIS EDITION'S AUTHOR

Savannah Stephens

AIR FORCE RESERVE PAO, DAF CIVILIAN

Savannah Stephens is a proud Air Force pilot wife, Reserve Public Affairs Officer, and a Department of the Air Force Civilian, currently serving as the Public Affairs Advisor for the 24th Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Fla.

She first found her love for AFA in 2015 as an intern in the communications department and at the Air Force Memorial.

To read Savannah's full biography, go to "Meet the ENGAGE Team" on page 28.

Table of Contents

The AFA Perspective	4
Your Compass to Connection	6
Stars & Stripes in San Antonio	8
United Under the Skies	10
Building Community Regardless of Branch	11
Anchored by Kindness	11
A Journey & Passion for Serving Military-Connected Women	12
Connected by Service, United Online	14
Connecting Is a Choice	16
From Air Force Officer to YouTube Sensation	18
Join the AFA Family	24
ENGAGE Online	25
Connect & Support	26
Meet the ENGAGE Team	28

The AFA Perspective

Find your people and, together, you'll do great things for your mission. Your mission may be related to your career, but it can also be a part of your faith, your family, or anything that fills your heart.

Our fourth edition of ENGAGE is dedicated to the power of community. The pages that follow are filled with stories of individuals who wanted to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They are intentionally making a positive impact on the world around them. These are stories of members of our Air and Space Forces community who followed their hearts and found their mission. In this edition, we celebrate the community builders who are making our Air Force and our Space Force stronger.

Our Air & Space Forces Association (AFA) family is built on that same power of community. Our first President, General James H. Doolittle authored a letter in May of 1947 to all who were in the Army Air Forces. He encouraged this group to join the newly founded Air Force Association to "keep the gang together."

When I reflect on the AFA accomplishments I've witnessed over the past two decades and those from the giants who came before us, I cannot name a single example where success did not rest with a strong community. The heart of this association is our people. We are a volunteer-led organization of individuals who come together for the collective good of our perfect mission. As General Doolittle said, our Field and our people are "the heart, soul, and conscience of this Association."

In recent years, I've had the pleasure of working with an inspiring group of military spouses who served on AFA's United Forces & Families (F2) Task Force. Over a two-year period, this Task Force provided direct recommendations into AFA's direction for supporting military families. They helped shape our events and led the integration of quality-of-life issues on AFA's main stages. Their shared experiences and connections helped inform a new AFA program where to provide family readiness grants. That grant program has reached over 141,000 individuals. The efforts of our F2 Task Force directly influenced the creation of this ENGAGE publication series.

When I think back to how it all started, it was a simple, genuine conversation with a senior spouse at the 2022 AFA Warfare Symposium where we pondered how we can do more to support military families. That connection was the start of our United Forces & Families community. You never know where a heartfelt connection will take you.

As you read this edition, I hope you will find inspiration to grow your own communities around the missions that matter to you. We're honored to have you as a part of our AFA community and our mission to support our Airmen, Guardians and their Families.



Kari

Kari Voliva
AFA Vice President, Member & Field Relations

MISSION

AFA's mission is to promote dominant U.S. Air and Space Forces as the foundation of a strong National Defense; to honor and support our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families; and to remember and respect our enduring Heritage.

The F2 Mission

To unite forces and families, strengthening quality of life for Air and Space communities.

The F2 Vision & Values

A culture where strong families continually build stronger forces.

Inclusion | Family | Community | Education | Advocacy

VALUES



*where strong families
build stronger forces*

Your Compass to Connection

Building a Support Community Through Every PCS

Community is defined as a group of people living in the same place or having a particular characteristic in common. What's our common characteristic? Military life—the uncertainty, uprooting, new friendships, and constant change.

Continually restarting and rebuilding a military support community can feel daunting, especially if you've just relocated or are living in a civilian-dominated area. But fostering connections with people who understand military life is not only rewarding—it's essential for emotional and practical support.

For me, it's the people who will sit on my couch on New Year's Eve watching the Taylor Swift Eras Tour while my husband is deployed. It's those who have become more than just co-workers—they've become family. My community has seen me at my best and when I fall short, brought our family a hot meal after having a baby, cheered me on through my fitness goals, and stepped up when I needed it most.

But how can you find community? How can you get plugged in?

If you're near a base, tap into resources like the Military and Family Readiness Centers, local USOs, or even fitness classes on base. Many installations also host events like picnics, spouse meet-ups, or community volunteer opportunities to help get to know others.

For those living far from an installation, determine if National Guard or Reserve units are nearby. These locations often serve as hubs for military families and veterans.

Also, online platforms are a game-changer for military families. Search for local or regional military spouse Facebook groups, veteran support forums, or Instagram communities. Apps like [Military OneSource](#) can connect you with resources specific to your area and platforms like [Wives of the Armed Forces](#) can help you meet others online and in person while also providing unique insights about military life as a spouse.





Non-profit organizations like the Military Spouse Advocacy Network or Blue Star Families offer virtual support and often have local chapters.

Another great way to get involved is by joining your local AFA chapter. As an AFA member, you can plug into local initiatives while also remaining connected to the broader AFA mission.

Even if there's no military base nearby, there are likely other military-connected individuals in your area. Attend community events, volunteer, or join local organizations—military families often stand out and are eager to connect with others who share their experiences.

Building a community takes effort, but a simple coffee date or text can be the start of a meaningful friendship.

Can't find what you're looking for? Build it yourself! Start a small meet-up for military spouses, veterans, or even Active-duty members. Local social media groups or community boards, online and physical, can help you spread the word.

Your group can focus on anything—fitness, parenting, career development, or just socializing. The key is to keep it welcoming and inclusive.



Savannah

Savannah Stephens
Air Force Reserve PAO Airman

WHY IT MATTERS

The military community thrives on mutual support that often happens in the small moments. Offer to help a new family unpack, babysit during a deployment, or simply lend a listening ear. Generosity fosters strong bonds and encourages others to pay it forward.

Building a military support community won't happen overnight, but every step you take—meeting one new person, attending one event—builds upon the last. Even in the most uncomfortable moments, it is worth it to be vulnerable in a situation where others are likely feeling the same way. Celebrate these milestones and trust that your network will grow over time.

Whether you're stationed in a bustling military town or a quiet suburb, you have the tools to create a thriving support system. Remember, no matter where you are, you're not alone, and the military community is always just a conversation away.

Stars & Stripes in San Antonio

There's No Place Like 'Military City, USA'™

If you've ever visited San Antonio, Texas, you've probably noticed a unique sense of pride and connection to the military that seems woven into the fabric of the city.

"Military City, USA™ is not just a moniker; the name has been officially trademarked by the United States Patent and Trademark Office for the sole use by the City of San Antonio. It symbolizes San Antonio's long-standing social, historical, and economic relationship with the community," said Maj. Gen. Juan G. Ayala, USMC (Ret.), Director, City of San Antonio Military and Veteran Affairs.

"The name was awarded to San Antonio due to its immense monetary, political, and other resource investments supporting the military's missions, families, and veteran community. In other words, San Antonio's support is more than mere words; our support is effective and tangible," he added.

"In other words, San Antonio's support is more than mere words; our support is effective and tangible."

*Maj. Gen. Juan G. Ayala,
USMC (Ret.)
Director, City of San Antonio
Military and Veteran Affairs*



A Historic Connection

San Antonio's bond with the military dates back more than 300 years to the founding of the Alamo, a mission that later became the iconic site of a pivotal battle during Texas' fight for independence. However, the city's modern military significance took shape in the early 20th century when Fort Sam Houston became a major hub for training and operations. Today, the fort is home to the U.S. Army Medical Command and the Army's largest medical training center, solidifying its critical role in national defense. The city's relationship with the military only deepened with the establishment of Joint Base San Antonio (JBSA), a consolidation of Fort Sam Houston, Lackland Air Force Base, and Randolph Air Force Base. JBSA is now the largest joint base in the Department of Defense¹, serving as a hub for training, innovation, and support.



The Economy Runs on Military Influence

The military is more than a historical or cultural pillar in San Antonio—it's also an economic engine. With JBSA employing tens of thousands of Active duty personnel, civilians, and contractors, the economic impact is staggering. Local businesses benefit from the steady demand for goods and services, and the city thrives on the economic stability the military brings. JBSA is the largest military economic contributor in the state of Texas with more than \$55 billion going into the Texas economy.

But San Antonio doesn't just benefit from the military's presence—it gives back. Organizations like the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce actively engage in initiatives to support military members, veterans, and their families. The city hosts career fairs, provides educational opportunities, and fosters connections between transitioning service members and local employers.

A Welcoming Community for Veterans and Families

For military families, San Antonio feels like home. The city offers a wealth of resources tailored to their unique needs. Schools near JBSA understand the challenges of military life and provide support for children who frequently move or have parents deployed overseas. Nonprofits like the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) work closely with local schools to ensure that no child falls behind. The City of San Antonio has also addressed some of the military's greatest challenges to families. The City has invested nearly \$1 million of its own funds to pay for employment fellowships at companies, nonprofits, and other businesses for Active duty and veteran spouses. In addition, it has offered paid job training for transitioning service members and veterans. Recently, the city signed a memorandum of understanding with the military to address the ongoing child care challenges facing many Active duty military families.

For veterans, the transition to civilian life can be daunting, but San Antonio has made it easier. The city is home to the Audie L. Murphy VA Hospital, a top-tier facility offering medical care, mental health support, and specialized services. Plus, organizations like Soldiers' Angels and Wounded Warrior Project are headquartered in the city, providing everything from care packages to long-term recovery programs.



A Culture of Appreciation

Walk through San Antonio, and you'll see the military influence everywhere—whether it's the military appreciation nights at Spurs games, the monuments in Military Plaza, or the countless bumper stickers proudly declaring, "Support Our Troops." Residents go out of their way to show appreciation for service members, creating an environment where the sacrifices of military families are recognized and celebrated.

The city also hosts events like Fiesta San Antonio, which honors the military with parades and special activities. Veterans Day and Memorial Day are celebrated with a particular reverence here, with ceremonies and community gatherings drawing large crowds.

Whether you're Active duty, a veteran, or someone who just appreciates the sacrifices of our armed forces, San Antonio welcomes you with open arms—and that's why it's truly "Military City, USA™."

Making a Difference



United Under the Skies: *The Community Impact of Air Force Flyovers*

Meet Katie Spencer—a kindhearted person with a truly unique job. Katie wears a lot of hats: she's a Department of the Air Force (DAF) civilian, an Air Force Reserve Public Affairs Officer, and an all-around networking powerhouse.

In her role as the Sports Outreach Program Manager for the DAF Public Affairs, Katie does something pretty amazing; she's responsible for connecting teams, leagues, and their fans across the country with Airmen, Guardians, and the capabilities of the Air Force and Space Force. Whether it's the NFL, NHL, MLB, or NCAA, Katie makes it all happen—coordinating Air Force flyovers at major sporting events all over the country.

So, why does she do it? According to Katie, it's all about the little moments that spark big dreams.

"You have a little boy or girl in the stands, and they see this massive aircraft flying overhead," Spencer explained. "And hopefully that moment stays with them and they want to grow up to be a pilot or navigator, or just want to serve."

Her work isn't only about flyovers; it's about creating a lasting connection. Katie's job is to introduce people to

the Air Force mission—highlighting a side of the military they might not know about while also evoking a sense of pride.

"People love their sports and they love their military," said Spencer. "So what a privilege for me to be able to bridge that gap by showcasing our capabilities to these communities."

But don't be fooled—this is no small task. Katie pulls together many moving parts to ensure these events are successful, from working with the sports organizations to ensuring everything goes off without a hitch on game day.

It's a big responsibility, but Katie knows it's worth it.

"These areas are where our troops live, it's where their families work and go to school," she said. "It's so important to connect with the community and continue to build trust with local partners and people. And what better way to say, 'Hey, the Air Force is here to support,' than with a flyover at the local sports event, or with cool demos and toys at a tailgate? We owe it to the public to show up, and sports is a great way to inspire patriotism and appreciation!"

In short, Katie's work creates unforgettable moments that inspire future generations, foster national pride, and strengthen the bond between the Air Force and the population it protects. It's a role that proves the power of community and connection—one flyover at a time.



Anchored by Kindness: *An Alaskan Christmas of Community & Resilience*

During the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, Bethany and her husband were stationed in the interior of Alaska at Eielson Air Force Base in Fairbanks, Alaska. Due to the quarantine regulations in place, her husband had to leave three weeks earlier than planned, which meant he left a week before Christmas. Flight prices were extremely high due to the pandemic and she was taking care of their new puppy, so Bethany chose to stay in Alaska and not travel to be with her family. While she was worried about being alone for Christmas, her community came through. Not only did friends from their unit have her over for Christmas Eve, but their Squadron Commander and his family dropped off a huge box of food and drinks for her on Christmas Day. They brought her a full holiday feast showing just how much they cared about their service members and their families.

One of the many crazy things that come with Alaskan winters, in addition to weeks of subzero temperatures, is inevitable snow that doesn't melt for months at a time. Every time they had a large snowfall, someone from the Explosive Ordnance Disposal shop would show up at her house and shovel snow off her driveway and porch without even asking. They also came to the rescue when her car got stuck while driving to work during a snowstorm. They always took care of Bethany (and their puppy Blu), and never expected anything in return.

In addition to their local military community, some of her amazing military spouse friends sent her care packages full of her favorite goodies she could not get in Alaska, like the must-haves from Target and Trader Joe's—something she said she would never forget.

“I was in a survival mode season of life, and the support system of our military community is a huge reason I survived!”

Bethany currently lives in Charlottesville, Va., while her husband attends the University of Virginia through an Air Force-sponsored doctorate program. She is the proud owner of Bethany Reasoner Photography, capturing couples, families, and all of the life moments in between.



Building Community Regardless of Branch

*Army Col. Allie
Weiskopf's Story*

As an Active duty Army officer living on MacDill Air Force Base, I couldn't do it without my Air Force family. I often travel outside the United States. One day, my son's teacher's husband died while she was teaching. Without even knowing, one mom picked up my son with the other kids and another mom picked up my other son from aftercare. Knowing this was a hard day for the kids, a third mom had all the kids over for a Moana watching to have all the kids in one place and to check on them. I was on the other side of the world and so grateful for this wonderful community that looks out for one another. I've recently asked to extend my time on Team MacDill, and that's because of the Air Force community and how it has wrapped its arms around us.



LYL Retreat in Montana, hosted by Christina

LEADING WITH PURPOSE

A Journey & Passion for Serving Military-Connected Women

In a world that often feels disconnected, Christina Mattison has dedicated herself to fostering community and empowering women, particularly those with military ties. Her journey from being an Active duty Civil Engineer Officer to full-time yoga teacher, leadership coach, and community builder has been full of the unexpected.

Her story began during the COVID-19 pandemic. She separated from Active duty and opened a yoga studio just before the world shut down, and was determined to find a way to connect people despite the restrictions. What started as an awkward “little Facebook group” quickly evolved into a thriving online community. Mattison began hosting weekly live sessions, sharing meditations and posts focused on underserved communities—specifically women associated with the military, whether Active duty,

veterans, or spouses. Within 18 months, her group grew from 25 members to over 2,500. Today, her combined reach across Instagram, the podcast, and retreats exceed 16,000 people.

“It’s been an amazing experience,” Mattison said. “I try to listen to the needs of the community and tailor what I offer. I’ve grown so much through developing this community, but I’ve also had to battle some serious imposter syndrome, feeling like I’m not good enough to be this community builder.”

Mattison’s journey into leadership coaching began with her deep connection to yoga and mindfulness. With two different 500-hour yoga teacher certifications, she had the tools to go beyond the physical practice and delve

into emotional and mental well-being. Recognizing the need for a more immersive approach, she launched her coaching program, “[Lead Your Life](#),” in 2021. Initially focused on self-care and leadership, the program has since evolved through six successful cohorts, each hosting eight to 12 women.

“Too many women dim their own light to not rock the boat. I want to help them step into their power and be proud of themselves.”

One of her most impactful initiatives has been hosting [women's retreats](#). These gatherings, which began in 2021, provide a safe space for women of different backgrounds to connect and grow. The retreats started small, with Mattison and seven women sharing a weekend together, and have since grown to having waiting lists for each one.

“The in-person connection is so powerful,” she said. “It gave us a deeper bond from day one. Nothing is more impactful than hearing someone say, ‘I thought I had to

do this alone,’ or ‘I didn’t think anyone else dealt with this’ when we’re talking in large group settings.”

Since then, Mattison has hosted retreats in locations like Vermont, Montana, Sedona, and Daytona Beach. Her goal for the next few years is to take the retreats international, continuing to foster community and connection for women worldwide.

In June 2023, she launched her [podcast](#) as an alternative platform to social media.

“I wanted a way to share stories and leadership advice that people could consume on their way to work,” she explained. “My episodes offer bite-sized nuggets of wisdom, self-care tips, and interviews with inspiring women, all in a way that’s easy to digest.”

As a mom, wife, Airman in the Reserve, yoga instructor, and leadership coach, she acknowledges that balance is a myth.

“There are seasons of life where different priorities take center stage,” she said. “I’ve learned to outsource and accept help, whether it’s editing my podcasts or managing my workload. If people think I’m the one doing everything

for each of these platforms I have, I’m humbled, but no way. I love having assistants help me in different aspects of my business. Knowing I’m helping pay someone else’s bills while pursuing my passions is amazing.”

At the heart of Mattison’s mission is the belief in the power of community.

“We are biologically wired for connection and belonging,” she said. “When we find a community with similar values, it creates safety and support. Prioritizing relationships is more important than ever in the digital world we live in.”

Mattison’s work can be found on Instagram [@TheMilitaryYogi](#) and her Facebook group, “[Strong and Resilient Women](#).” Her retreats, coaching programs, and podcast offer a variety of ways to connect and grow. She truly has something for everyone.”



FIND CHRISTINA ONLINE
←
[@THEMILITARYYOGI](#)



Jennifer Ferrell & Kirstin Navaroli, founders of WAFs

WIVES OF THE ARMED
FORCES CULTIVATE A GLOBAL
COMMUNITY

Connected by Service, United Online

"How do we positively impact the negative narrative behind the military spouse community?"

That was the question running through Jennifer Ferrell and Kirstin Navaroli's minds when they came up with the idea for Wives of the Armed Forces (WAFs). WAFs was inspired by the idea of what these two women wish they would've had when they began dating a military member.

What started out as an idea to positively impact a small group of people has now spread across all the military branches, and is making waves of change across military communities worldwide.

From the beginnings of their original blog to now having more than 30,000 followers on Instagram, these women have sparked a fire in military spouses and are creating change at the grassroots level.

"We believe that the military community is in crisis right now—between the general social culture of isolation and lack of consistent military leadership support for spouse groups—it feels like what used to be a thriving, reliable community is extinct," remarked Ferrell.

"We hope that through a grassroots effort, we can forge on with a solution to make it better for those who come behind us. Candidly that starts with not solely relying on our unit leadership to take charge."

A topic they've focused deeply on is how to get plugged into new communities. They have written blogs, connected with other knowledgeable military spouses, and shared advice on overcoming the fear of putting yourself out there after a PCS or joining the military.

"It's NORMAL to feel awkward when you're in a new place trying to meet new people. We can promise you that you're not as awkward as you feel," they said. "The person on the other side of the conversation likely doesn't have it figured out either."

WIVES OF THE
Armed Forces

Facebook: [@WivesoftheAirForce](https://www.facebook.com/WivesoftheAirForce)

Instagram: [@WivesoftheArmedForces](https://www.instagram.com/WivesoftheArmedForces)

Pinterest: [@WivesoftheAirForce](https://www.pinterest.com/WivesoftheAirForce)

WivesOftheArmedForces.com

Ferrell and Navaroli repeatedly talked about encouraging military spouses and significant others, commonly referred to as “milso” to learn from life experiences of others. They encourage others to challenge their way of thinking and open their hearts to do something new.

“Community means unlocking access to the life experiences of those around you to live a more inspired, enriched life,” Navaroli shared. “It means having a safe place to fall back on when you need extra support and in turn, selflessly serving those around you when they find themselves in a place of need.”

Since the inception of the WAFS in 2018, these two women have not only been successful in building up military spouses around the world but also how self-care and individual wellness impacts the experience of so many military spouses and girlfriends.

“We are currently discovering the true meaning of wellness. We aren’t talking about green juices and cold plunges. Often as military spouses, we put our heads down and grind our way through life to keep things going for our family. But if we are constantly exhausted and depleted, then what?” said Ferrell. “Taking care of our bodies with movement and nutrition, and our minds and hearts with spirituality and our lens of viewing experiences matters.”

When asked how to better show up for our communities, the two were full of ideas. From getting a gym membership with your best friend, to swapping dinners at each other’s houses when your partner is away, to simply reminding one another how capable they are and walking a productive road alongside them, the idea they continued to refer back

to was intentionally taking care of one another, even when it feels uncomfortable.

“A community doesn’t rely on the military, but instead relies upon the shared experiences and compassion for each other.”

As the WAFs community continues to expand, Ferrell and Navaroli have big dreams for the future. They want to continue to grow and reach all branches, whether it’s Active Duty, Guard, or Reserve. They see the large number of military significant others who need support. Their hope is that this community can help pave the way for those coming behind them for what a supportive, empowered community looks and feels like.

“A community doesn’t rely on the military, but instead relies upon the shared experiences and compassion for each other.”



JEN & KIRST'S FAVORITE IDEAS TO GET INVOLVED ON BASE & IN THE COMMUNITY

1. Creating a welcome committee that brings goodies to the home of new members (even if the committee is just you!)
2. Use one of our private, branch-specific Facebook groups to connect with other milsos at your next assignment, and start an open-invitation dinner at your house that people can count on (such as a Taco Tuesday).
3. Build a social group, one person at a time, with intentional invites to things you’re already doing (e.g., park playdates, workout classes, Friday night takeout dinner in), and then start adding more people into the mix as you learn about them arriving in your area.
4. Bring a buddy—it’s not fun showing up to something solo. If you can connect with someone in your unit prior to getting there, ask them if you can go to an upcoming event together.
5. Rely on the friendships you’ve already established for hype and support. Nothing makes us happier than knowing the people we love are loved and taken care of when we’re not there, so when we hear they’re putting themselves out there we love sending them off with support and hype from afar. Lean on those people in your life, so you go into the event/interaction confident!



Connecting Is a Choice

Dr. Jason 'JW' Womack: Connecting Through Coaching & Leadership

"Connection is not something you find," said Dr. Jason 'JW' Womack, a best-selling author, speaker, and United States Space Force civilian. "It's something you create."

Womack has spent most of his career learning about and becoming an expert in organizational leadership. With more than 20 years of industry experience, he has spoken to thousands about the importance of human connection.

In 2019, Womack shifted from the civilian world to becoming a Department of the Air Force civilian teaching at Air University in the Leadership Development Course.

"I taught an eight-day course to senior leaders on trusting, adapting, and connecting," said Womack. "I was able to practice what I taught through a global pandemic, changes in administration, and social unrest that happened over four and a half years."

Now, working as a USSF civilian, he's able to take his education and experiences and help drive change in service members of all ranks and their families.



"You cannot effectively lead others until you understand yourself," said Womack. "This can go for a spouse as well. You can't effectively engage and connect with others until you understand who is looking back at you in the mirror."

The acronym he uses for this idea is N2C2: nature, nurture, choice, and chance.

With military spouses and families in mind, consider this:

- **Nature:** What is the military spouse's nature? Is it to travel around or stay in one place?
- **Nurture:** How were they rewarded or corrected?
- **Choice:** What choices has the spouse made for themselves or had made for them?
- **Chance:** What chances have they taken or were taken on them?

He describes the spouse's life as being in full color, not monochromatic. Spouses have a purpose for their lives, for their finances, for the family unit, and so many other things. It's not black and white what spouses deal with living the military lifestyle.

"Spouses took the chance to marry into this organization. They chose to follow along wherever their

service member was going,” said Womack. “Now, how will their nature and nurture patterns affect them where they’re at? How can we help them succeed?”

When asked how to create meaningful relationships, he said you have to be present without having the pressure to solve.

As humans, we naturally want to solve the problems put in front of us. As a military spouse, you may want to solve a friend’s problem when instead they simply need you to lend a listening ear.

“How can you call somebody tonight and be present without the pressure to solve the problem?” he asked.

To create meaningful relationships, Womack recommends being intentional, being available, and being valuable:

- to want the best for the other person
- to figure out how to be available in someone's life when they need you
- to see what value you can provide.

“Do I wait for connection to happen or do I do it myself?” said Womack. “That choice is a military spouse’s life.”

He shared his own personal experiences that it's always a risk extending your hand with the chance of getting hurt, but connecting with others is not a luxury.

“Connection is not a nice-to-have. It’s a foundation for military spouses feeling resilient, feeling successful, and feeling fulfilled,” he said. “Spouses who engage in their communities find connections faster.”

Volunteer. Mentor. Lead. Those are the words Dr. Womack used to encourage people to get involved in their community.

“Every human has an experience that can be shared with someone else,” said Womack.

“To make meaningful connections, you have to separate the difference between connection and connecting. Connecting is the present tense. Volunteer on base, mentor another spouse, choose to lead in your



*Connection is not
a nice-to-have. It's
a foundation for
military spouses
feeling resilient,
feeling successful,
and feeling fulfilled.*

community. Connecting is being present and making connections that matter.”

From Air Force Officer to YouTube Sensation

"Putting yourself in other people's shoes is big. It's kind of hard to remember that. If I do this, how will it make the other person feel? What impact will I leave?"

Understanding the magnitude of his message has landed Sam Eckholm where he is today.

From walking through the door of an Air Force Public Affairs office after graduating from the United States Air Force Academy as a Public Affairs Officer, to now being an Aerospace and Defense Content Creator with almost a million YouTube subscribers, Sam is chasing an incredible dream and creating a global community.

Following graduation, Sam was selected as a member of the F-22 Raptor Demonstration Team, where he traveled the world as a PAO, documenting air shows across the globe. He separated from Active duty in 2022, but his passion for military service didn't stop.

His entrepreneurial venture was driven by his remarkable talent as a visual storyteller and a community he knew he could reach online.

"I began building a following of people interested in the military. From the Top 10 Reasons to Join the Air Force to the first video I made of myself flying in a T-38, I realized I had opened a door," said Eckholm. "People began reaching out to me and I was met with a decision: do I continue serving in the military or do I serve the military community in a different way, as a civilian creating videos that would inspire millions?"

Sam says when he creates and publishes videos, he can see the views, likes, and comments, but it's hard to grasp just how large his audience is and how substantial of an impact he has left on others. A few times a year he hosts or attends in-person events like air shows and public



speaking engagements to interact with his online audience.

“Those in-person events really put things into perspective. Just being able to meet and hear from my audience in person, it makes me fired up to keep working harder and harder,” said Eckholm.

“It’s a different feeling when you’re out there and there’s dozens of people literally waiting in line to meet you or take a photo with you,” said Eckholm. “I’m just a guy who makes videos, and through watching those videos, people have told me they are what inspired them to pursue a military career... it’s pretty amazing.”

Eckholm has created more than 60 videos that feature first-hand insights from DoD missions and other organizations like the United States Secret Service.

“It’s cool being a creator who isn’t just in it for themselves. Really what I’m doing is helping highlight the amazing men and women who wear the uniform, educating the general public on what the military does, and inspiring others to consider a career serving.”

When asked what advice he had for people thinking about joining a new community, trying a hobby, or pursuing a new career, he said “dig deep down, realize what it is that fires you up, and just relentlessly go after it.”

You can find Sam on [Youtube](#), [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Discord](#).



“Really what I’m doing is helping highlight the amazing men and women who wear the uniform, educating the general public on what the military does, and inspiring others to consider a career serving.”



F2 Grants in Action

BENEFITING FAMILIES FOUNDATION

Since its formation in 2022, the Air & Space Force Association's United Forces & Families (F2) program has awarded 28 grants. Each grant makes a credible impact on the communities that request them.

The grants awarded in Florida and Colorado last fall are a perfect example. In October, AFA's Mile High Chapter 127 partnered with the Benefiting Families Foundation (BFF) to support 75 families at Buckley Space Force Base during the 2024 Anderson Farms Fall Festival, in Erie, Colo.

Some 75 families from Buckley—including Airmen and Guardians of the Buckley Exceptional Family Member Program, as well as family members of deployed service members—enjoyed activities for all ages, including wagon rides to a pumpkin patch, Colorado's largest corn maze, live entertainment, and a petting zoo. Ultimately, the event served to support those families facing challenges, strengthen their resilience, and boost morale, while encouraging connections and a sense of community among all the families at Buckley.

OPERATION CHILD CARE PROJECT

AFA's partnership with Operation Child Care Project (OCCP) was on full display during a bustling November weekend in Northwest Florida, marking the beginning of a long-term impact from which many military families will benefit.

AFA's F2 Program granted \$5,000 in funding support to OCCP's HomeFront Helpers Pilot, which will directly address the unique childcare challenges of military families stationed near Eglin Air Force Base and Hurlburt Field. The grant provided \$250 stipends to each of the 20 "Helpers" who attended the weekend cohort event and completed all online training, ensuring the Helpers met and exceeded DOD standards for in-home childcare requirements.

Over the course of the next year, these fully trained and vetted Helpers will plug into the local community to fill the childcare gaps as private caregivers for Hurlburt and Eglin families. These Helpers and the others that join the program as needs evolve will:

- Work one-on-one with requesting military families
- Be connected to military families in need of childcare through the OCCP Case Management system.
- Fulfill staffing needs when local childcare centers, both on- and off-base, are faced with staffing shortages.

"We know that at the core of most, if not all, quality of life issues that military families face is a lack of access to affordable quality childcare. With almost 75 percent of our Helper cohort being military spouses, prior service members, or retired military spouses, they deeply understood the challenges today's military families face," said Kayla Corbitt, CEO of Operation Child Care Project and Army Spouse.

These Helpers left the weekend feeling empowered, educated, and with a new community they didn't have just a few days before.



UNITED FORCES
& FAMILIES

*Excited to get started? United Forces
& Families is ready to help.*



Get Funding

Grants are available to support family readiness initiatives in your community. Bring your ideas to your local AFA chapter who can apply for a Field grant. Additionally, several focus grants are executed each year as pilot programs for future programming. Contact F2@AFA.org for more information.



Keep Going

Have other suggestions? Contact F2@AFA.org to share your ideas.

Did You Know? Airmen, Guardians, and military spouses can receive a free AFA membership to join the F2 community. [Join today.](#)



Help Us Amplify Impact

Your [donation](#) can help grow our initiatives promoting the quality of life for our Airmen, Guardians, and their Families.

UNITED FORCES & FAMILIES Join the AFA Family

We're excited for you to join our AFA family!

Supporting our Air Force family has been an important piece of AFA's mission since our inception in 1946. More than 75 years later, we remain committed to supporting all DAF families. We believe that improving the quality of life for Airmen, Guardians, and their Families is directly linked to stronger Families, united Forces, and the mission effectiveness of our Air and Space Forces.



[Click or Scan to Join](#)

By joining AFA, you are strengthening our united voice advocating for our DAF families. Here are a few ways your AFA membership will strengthen your leadership:

1

Opportunities to apply for F2 Grant funding to improve the quality of life for Airmen, Guardians and Families in your community

2

Constant updates and education on the issues facing our Air and Space Forces including a subscription to Air & Space Forces Magazine and the Daily Report

3

Invitations to special events including our two national conferences and special F2 celebrations

4

Opportunities to connect with local AFA leaders and chapters who are ready to support you!



ENGAGE Online

Read the first three issues digitally



Empowering
Guardians and Their
Families

Read Now



CLICK TO READ

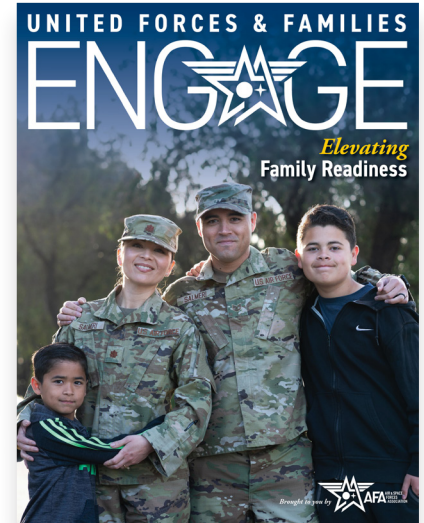


Childcare *Matters*

Read Now



CLICK TO READ



Elevating Family
Readiness

Read Now



CLICK TO READ

Powered By



BlueCross
BlueShield.



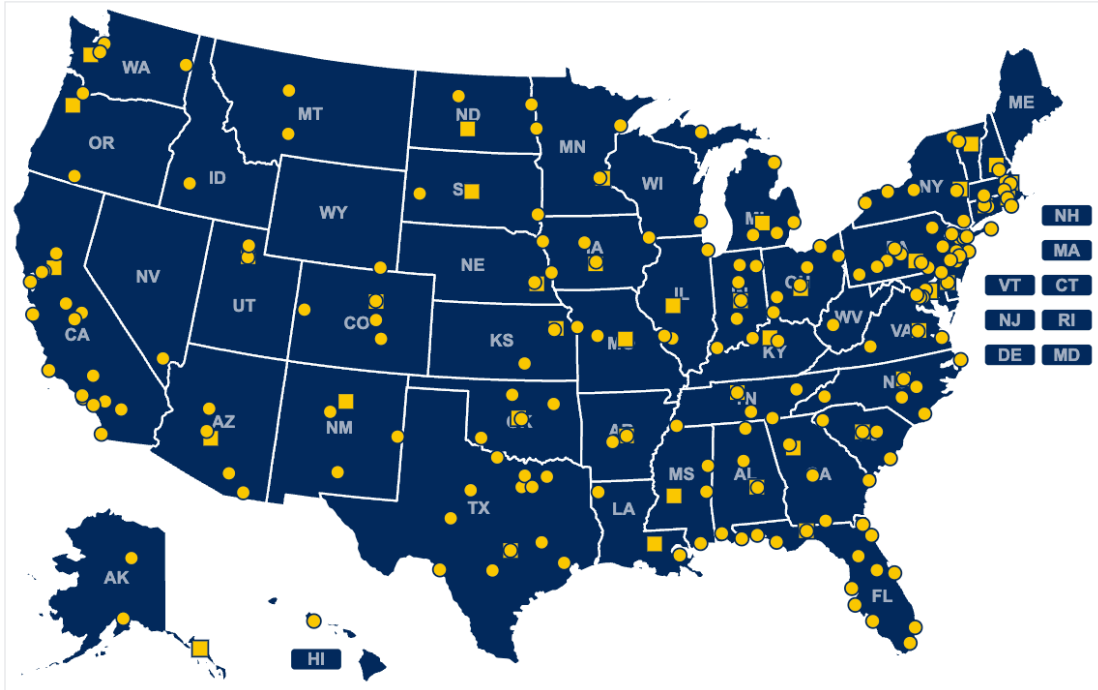
BlueCross
BlueShield.

FEP Dental[®]

FEP Vision[®]

Connect & Support

JOIN THE F2 COMMUNITY - FIND YOUR CHAPTER

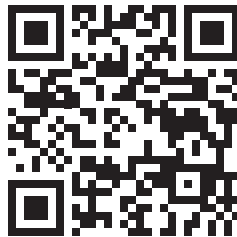


We have locations around the world, including three in the Pacific region, and five in the European region. To find your chapter on our interactive map, click the image to the left, or visit afa.org/field!



Upcoming Events

We hope you will join fellow AFA members, Airmen, Guardians, senior DAF leaders, and industry experts at some of AFA's professional development opportunities. At events like our Air, Space & Cyber Conference and AFA Warfare Symposium, you will engage in rich discussion and gain unique insights into aerospace power, opportunities, and challenges for our Air Force, Space Force, Airmen, and Guardians.





Connect With Us



@airandspaceforcesassociation



@afa_air_space



@air-space-forces-association



@afa_air_space

www.AFA.org/F2
F2@AFA.org



Meet the ENGAGE Team



Kari Voliva

VICE PRESIDENT, MEMBER & FIELD RELATIONS

Kari Voliva has served in a variety of roles at AFA over the last two decades supporting her chosen Air Force and Space Force family. Her current role as Vice President of Member & Field Relations oversees all of AFA's family readiness and quality of life initiatives, membership operations, volunteer components, governance support, scholarships, and wounded warrior support programs. Kari likes to roll all that up as Chief Kindness Officer because her job is all about helping others and putting more kindness into the world.

Kari holds a Master's of Public Policy with a concentration in Non-Profit Management and a Bachelor's Degree in Communications and International Politics. Both degrees are from George Mason University.

Kari is laughing her way through life with her husband Mike and their sweet family in Virginia. Her most cherished title is Mama to Rosie and Maddie Grace who inspire her to experience wonder every day and spread even more kindness into the world around us.



Find Kari Online

✉ kari@AFA.org
🌐 AFA.org/F2
in linkedin.com/in/karivoliva



Lyndsey Akers

SENIOR CONSULTANT, AFA F2 INITIATIVES FOUNDER & PRINCIPAL, AKERS&CO

Lyndsey Akers is a highly-regarded marketing and communications executive with an extensive track record in cultivating and growing military-connected brands. Since launching Akers&Co in 2020, Lyndsey and her team have worked with dozens of startups, ecommerce businesses, non-profits, and various impact-focused companies. Lyndsey's extensive professional experience spans Capitol Hill, corporate and entrepreneurial sectors. Today, Lyndsey coaches and consults for growing brands and businesses led by ambitious entrepreneurs.

AFA is a familiar home to Lyndsey as she served on AFA's communications team for several years where she supported event marketing, social media, traditional PR and various program efforts for the association. She returned in 2022 as the elected chair of AFA's United Forces & Families Task Force, a volunteer group of passionate military spouse advocates with the mission of advancing quality of life issues facing military families.

Organized chaos is the name of the game for Lyndsey and her Air Force husband these days as they continue curating wonderful experiences for their 5 year old daughter and 3 year old son. The Akers family is currently stationed at Hurlburt Field in the Florida Panhandle until Carolina calls them home following military service.



Find Lyndsey Online

🌐 <https://www.akers.co>
in <https://bit.ly/3BzWNml>



Jenn Montgomery

AFA ENGAGE GRAPHIC DESIGNER
OWNER, JEMOY CREATIVE

Jenn founded Jemoy Creative in 2022 while working remotely from Europe for a full-service marketing agency - she got up every day at the crack of dawn to squeeze in a few hours of 'her own thing'. She's spent her entire 15+ year career working at print shops and marketing agencies, and has had her hands in practically every role - receptionist, account and project manager, creative director, operations director, and graphic designer.

Jenn is a difference maker for solopreneurs and small business owners who are putting everything they've got into just making it. The difference is that she knows how to level up the marketing and design assets they're using so they're way beyond "good enough."

She is a proud Army veteran, Army wife, and Navy brat - the military runs in her blood, and she fiercely supports the heroes of our country.

Away from work, Jenn is keeping busy! She can be found selling hand-sewn wares at craft shows, experimenting in the kitchen with scratch-made goodies, gardening, and reading. Whenever she can, she loves exploring and experiencing new places and cultures, and considers herself a language junkie, proudly able to get around and feed herself in 5 languages!



Find Jenn Online

 JemoyCreative.com
 [@jemoycreative](https://www.instagram.com/jemoycreative)



Savannah Stephens

AUTHOR
AIR FORCE RESERVE PAO, DAF CIVILIAN

Savannah Stephens is a proud Air Force pilot wife, Reserve Public Affairs Officer, and a Department of the Air Force Civilian, currently serving as the Public Affairs Advisor for the 24th Special Operations Wing at Hurlburt Field, Florida.

Her journey started at the University of South Carolina, where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Public Relations in 2016. After commissioning as a Public Affairs Officer through Air Force ROTC, she spent seven years on Active duty, completing three assignments, a deployment, and a master's degree in Mass Communication from the University of Florida before transitioning to the Reserve.

She first found her love for AFA in 2015 as an intern in the communications department and at the Air Force Memorial.

When she's not juggling work and military life, you'll likely find Savannah listening to Taylor Swift, getting lost in a good book on her Kindle, or traveling with her family. She currently lives in Fort Walton Beach, Florida, with her husband, Drew, and their three little ones—Emersyn, Robert, and Caroline.

Find Savannah Online

 savannahgstephens@gmail.com
 <https://bit.ly/4g3PKCi>



AFA AIR & SPACE
FORCES
ASSOCIATION

www.AFA.org/F2