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### FEATURE



Photo by Airman 1st Class Katelynn Jackson  
**PURPLE UP PARADE**

See Pages 6 and 7

# Luke renames FT Center after beloved pilot, leader, and mentor

By Senior Airman  
**JAKOB HAMBRIGHT**

56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

The 56th Training Squadron hosted a renaming ceremony for the newly deemed Skip Hopler Fighter Training Center, March 29, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

“This building will serve as a world class training center for the F-35 for decades to come,” said retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Tom Jones, former deputy commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe and Africa. “For the men and women who train here, work here, and learn here, they’re going to refer to this building as the Skip Hopler building.”

Late and retired U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Edwin “Skip” Hopler was a renowned fighter pilot and instructor, serving 21 years as an F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot, which included two combat tours in Vietnam. In 1988, Hopler retired as a pilot but continued serving as an instructor at Luke AFB. He was directly responsible for the training of over 17,000 F-16 pilots, before he followed the Air Force into the F-35 Lightning II training program.



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Jakob Hambright

*The renaming of the Skip Hopler Fighter Training Center is revealed during a ceremony, March 29, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The late U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Edwin “Skip” Hopler was a former fighter pilot and instructor responsible for the training of more than 17,000 F-16 Fighting Falcon pilots.*

“We are so grateful that this building now shares Skip’s name,” said Heather Hopler, widow of Skip Hopler. “Skip was truly honored to have served here and impacted so many lives.”

After the ceremony, attendees participated in a long-standing fighter pilot tradition, “the nickel on the grass toast”, serving as a final salute to the fallen aviator.

The Skip Hopler Fighter Training Center immortalizes Hopler’s legacy amongst Luke AFB and the fighter pilot community. His dedication as a fighter pilot, leader, and mentor significantly enhanced both the F-16 and F-35 programs and directly contributed to the 56th Fighter Wing’s mission of training the world’s greatest fighter pilots and combat ready Airmen.



*A remembrance plaque is unveiled during the renaming ceremony of the Skip Hopler Fighter Training Center, March 29, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The Skip Hopler Fighter Training Center immortalizes the late U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Edwin “Skip” Hopler’s legacy amongst Luke AFB and the fighter pilot community.*



*A nickel on the grass toast” is held during the renaming ceremony of the Skip Hopler Fighter Training Center, March 29, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. After the ceremony, attendees participated in a long-standing fighter pilot tradition, “the nickel on the grass toast”, serving as a final salute to the fallen aviator, the late U.S. Air Force Lt. Col. Edwin “Skip” Hopler.*

## Luke Air Force Base Thunderbolt

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Submission deadline  
**15th day of the month**  
prior to date of publication

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All military branches are included  
Email name, phone number and a brief description of your service to [kim@aerotechnews.com](mailto:kim@aerotechnews.com)

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# Classroom leaders meet Luke AFB's finest

By Airman 1st Class  
MASON HARGROVE

56th Fighter Wing

The 56th Fighter Wing hosted Phoenix-area educators for a West Valley Educators Immersion Tour at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona, April 19, 2024.

Fifteen educators engaged in the tour and were briefed on the 56th Fighter Wing's mission, discovering opportunities for students with an interest in military careers. The visit fostered enhanced connections between Luke AFB and local communities, expanding awareness of the base's functions and activities.

"This immersion allowed the educators to come out to Luke AFB and make a connection with base leadership and various departments at Luke," said Stacey Holland, school liaison program manager. "We wanted everyone to get a better understanding of how we can work together to support our military-connected students."

The tour started off at the Luke AFB Navy Operational Support Center, where educators engaged with various units such as the 56th Medical Group, Range Management Office, Explosive Ordnance Disposal, Public Affairs, Security Forces Combat Arms, Fabrication Flight, Fighter Innovation, Communications Squadron,



U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Mason Hargrove

Members assigned to the 56th Medical Group, display medical equipment during the West Valley Educators immersion tour, April 19, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.

the Titan Arena's human performance team, and representatives from Air and Space Force recruitment.

The tour proceeded to the 61st Fighter Squadron and the air traffic control tower, offering educators a glimpse into the practical aspects of military careers and direct interactions with service members and their work environments.

"It's a great opportunity to form networks beyond their classrooms and into the military realm," said U.S. Air Force Col. Keegan McLeese, 56th Fighter Wing deputy commander. "They really get to see the vastness of what we do and the reality of our day-to-day life."

The day concluded with an honor guard demonstration followed by a military working dog demonstration.



U.S. Air Force Col. Keegan McLeese, 56th Fighter Wing deputy commander, speaks with 56th Medical Group Airmen during the West Valley Educators immersion tour, April 19, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The visit fostered enhanced connections between Luke AFB and local communities, expanding awareness of the base's functions and activities.



Members assigned to the Luke Air Force Base Honor Guard perform a mock funeral demonstration for West Valley Educators, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



West Valley Educators participate in a unit engagement seminar, April 19, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Fifteen educators joined the tour and were briefed on the 56th Fighter Wing's mission, discovering opportunities for students with an interest in military careers.

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# Luke unveils Fiesta Bowl field

By Senior Airman  
**JAKOB HAMBRIGHT**

56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

A ribbon cutting ceremony for the new Fiesta Bowl field was held April 11, 2024, as Luke Air Force Base seeks to improve recreational opportunities for Airmen and their families.

The ceremony capped off an eight-month renovation project of Luke AFB's outdoor track and football field.

In partnership with the Fiesta Bowl, the renovation included

a total overhaul of the football field, which was fitted with turf previously used during the 2023 Fiesta Bowl football game.

Following the ceremony, the field inaugurated its activities with a football camp for Luke AFB children hosted by the Fiesta Bowl.

Following in line with the 56th Fighter Wing's effort to increase quality of life for Airmen and their families, the track and field will be incorporated into existing wellness and recreational facilities on base.



Leadership and other community members of the 56th Fighter Wing cut a ribbon during a reopening ceremony of the Fiesta Bowl field, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



The Fiesta Bowl Field scoreboard stands over the new track and field during a ribbon cutting ceremony, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



Leadership and other community members of the 56th Fighter Wing attend a ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Fiesta Bowl field, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force photos by Senior Airman Jakob Hambright

Luke Air Force Base children participate in a football training camp during the opening of the Fiesta Bowl field, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. In partnership with the Fiesta Bowl, Luke AFB capped off an eight-month renovation project of the outdoor track and football field, which featured the installment and use of turf previously used during the 2023 Fiesta Bowl football game.



Luke Air Force Base children participate in a football training camp during the opening of the Fiesta Bowl field, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Col. Keagan McLeese, 56th Fighter Wing deputy commander, gives remarks during the ribbon-cutting ceremony of the Fiesta Bowl field, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. In partnership with the Fiesta Bowl, Luke AFB capped off an eight-month renovation project of the outdoor track and football field, which featured the installment and use of turf previously used during the 2023 Fiesta Bowl football game.



Luke Air Force Base children participate in a football training camp during the opening of the Fiesta Bowl field, April 11, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. In partnership with the Fiesta Bowl, Luke AFB capped off an eight-month renovation project of the outdoor track and football field, which featured the installment and use of turf previously used during the 2023 Fiesta Bowl football game.

**U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brandy Preston, 56th Operational Support Squadron aircrew flight equipment lead trainer, showcases her doctorate of community care and counseling, March 8, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Preston is just one of many examples of Airmen who utilize the education benefits that are available to those who serve.**



U.S. Air Force photo by Senior Airman Jakob Hambright

# Tech. Sgt. earns Doctorate

By Senior Airman  
**JAKOB HAMBRIGHT**

56th Fighter Wing Public Affairs

Education serves as the cornerstone of our ability to effectively serve others. It empowers individuals to innovate, collaborate, and implement solutions that have a positive impact on those around them.

For U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brandy Preston, 56th Operational Support Squadron aircrew flight equipment lead trainer, her pursuit of education and subsequent work in her local community has guided her to what she views as her purpose.

"It's been one of those things where I realized I'm walking in my purpose, and this is what I've been called to do," said Preston. "There are so many people out there struggling, and it gives me peace of mind knowing that these people see me as someone they can sit down and talk with."

Preston started her education before joining the U.S. Air Force, earning an undergraduate's degree in psychology from Virginia Commonwealth University. After

joining, Preston went on to Liberty University, where she achieved her master's in clinical mental health counseling, followed by her doctorate in community care and counseling, specializing in traumatology, which she finished in January of this year.

While pursuing her graduate degrees, Preston had to adapt her daily lifestyle to manage the extra workload.

"I started getting up at 3 a.m., which gave me three hours to do schoolwork," said Preston. "After that, I would go to the gym at 6 a.m., then immediately head into work at 7:30 a.m."

On top of changing her daily routine, Preston's leadership ensured that she would have even more time to achieve her goals.

"For the master's degree, one of the requirements was completing a 600-hour internship," said Preston. "My leadership was super supportive, so they put paperwork in that allowed me to go to the internship two days a week, in exchange for working a ten or twelve-hour shift, instead of my usual eight."

Now a certified and licensed

counselor, Preston works at a local counselling center, specializing in helping first responders dealing with trauma.

"I mainly work with first responders like military, veterans, firefighters, police, and others who deal with past traumas that they need help talking about," said Preston. "I also counsel a lot of women dealing with sexual assault and harassment, as well as prenatal mental health."

Preston also found a way to benefit the Air Force with her education, now being able to mentor and help her fellow Airmen.

"I get a lot of mentorship opportunities, especially with my troops and other Airmen within my work center," said Preston. "Most of them are just starting out in their education journey, and I've been able to help them navigate the process of starting school and being able to use their tuition assistance and other benefits."

While the challenge of choosing the right school can be difficult, Preston emphasized the importance of doing research before making that decision.

"The biggest tip I would give someone is to take your time and choose what schools are going to be a good fit for you and that are flexible and accommodating to those in the military," said Preston. "My schools had military support departments that worked with my schedule and were even able to help me get various military discounts that the schools provided."

Having completed her education goals, Preston now looks towards her future goals and endeavors.

"Eventually I'd like to open my own private practice," said Preston. "Either focusing on first responders or a women's clinic that is more holistic and approachable than some other options open to people."

Preston's education journey, while unique, is just one of many examples of the benefits that Airmen have access to while serving. These benefits are available to all who don the uniform every day in support of the mission of the 56th Fighter Wing and the U.S. Air Force.

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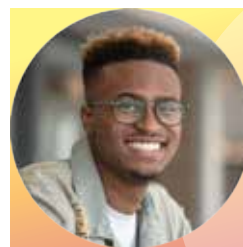
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# D-BACKS GO PURPLE FOR MILITARY KIDS



*Lance Dare, Wayland Baptist University site coordinator, interacts with a local family during a Purple Up Arizona Diamondbacks game, April 12, 2024, in Phoenix, Arizona. The Diamondbacks hosted a Purple Up night to celebrate Month of the Military Child. Month of the Military Child helps bring awareness to the various challenges that military children can face.*



*U.S. Air Force honor guardsmen assigned to the 56th Fighter Wing present the colors during a Purple Up Arizona Diamondbacks game, April 12, 2024, in Phoenix, Arizona.*



*U.S. Air Force Col. Peter Abercrombie, 56th Mission Support Group commander, presents a U.S. flag to Luis Gonzalez, Arizona Diamondbacks special assistant to the president, during a Diamondbacks game, April 12, 2024, in Phoenix, Arizona. The flag presented to Gonzalez was flown in various Arizona-based military aircraft, such as an F-35 Lightning II, UH-60 Black Hawk, A-10 Thunderbolt II, and KC-135 Stratotanker.*



*Volunteers from the 56th Fighter Wing and Wayland Baptist University present a booth during a Purple Up Arizona Diamondbacks game, April 12, 2024, in Phoenix, Arizona.*

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# PURPLE UP PARADE SALUTES M

By Deputy Secretary of Defense  
Kathleen Hicks

DOD news

Purple Up! Day, a special day in April — the Month of the Military Child — is when we recognize the contributions and achievements of our nation's 1.6 million military children. And it is my privilege to join in the celebration.

Growing up in a military family can be a rewarding and enriching experience.

You have the opportunity to travel, build connections with people from all walks of life, and serve our nation. In fact, DOD schools often lead among schools across the country in educational progress and outcomes.

Yet whether or not they're enrolled in DOD schools, military kids grow up to have a big impact on our country and culture — from actress-turned-media-mogul Reese Witherspoon to singer and dancer Ciara to NFL quarterback Justin Fields, and Disney CEO Bob Iger. Not to mention other leaders in entertainment, sports, business, and government.

But it can also be a challenging way to grow up.

Moving from duty station to duty station every couple of years. Transferring schools and making new friends. Missing a parent — or perhaps more than one parent — on special occasions.

I'm familiar with the benefits and difficulties of growing up in a military family. Because of my father's service in the United States Navy, I grew up on bases across the country — from Connecticut to Hawaii.

One thing remains true in all of this: We have the fiercest fighting force in the world because we have the finest military families in the world. So, in the Department of Defense, we are committed to taking care of our people — ensuring that military families, including kids, receive the support and tools that allow them to thrive.

Recent investments from the fiscal year 2024 defense budget will establish universal pre-K in DOD schools, increase pay for childcare providers, and improve family housing. These investments will help shape even more outstanding military children and strengthen military families.

I know from firsthand experience that to be in a military family involves its own level of service and sacrifice. So today, I am especially proud to "Purple Up!" for military kids. But please know that each and every day, we are grateful for our military children for all they do to ensure our national security.



Children and caretakers from the Luke Air Force Base Child Development Center pose for a photo during a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



Children and caretakers from the Luke Air Force Base Child Development Center walk in a line during a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



U.S. Air Force Maj. Christopher Kirk, 61st Fighter Squadron pilot, waves to his son during a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. The parade provides Luke AFB families an opportunity to celebrate their children and recognize the challenges they face. These events contribute to increasing quality of life at Luke AFB, honoring the military members and their children.

# MILITARY CHILD



U.S. Air Force photos by Airman 1st Class Katelynn Jackson  
during a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



Children and caretakers from the Luke Air Force Base Child Development Center participate in a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona.



A child from the Luke Air Force Base Child Development Center blows a kiss to her mother during a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke Air Force Base, Arizona. Purple represents the joint branches and the military children that sacrifice alongside service members across the Department of Defense.



Fighter Squadron  
parade, April 19,  
the parade provided  
operate military chil-  
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at Luke AFB by  
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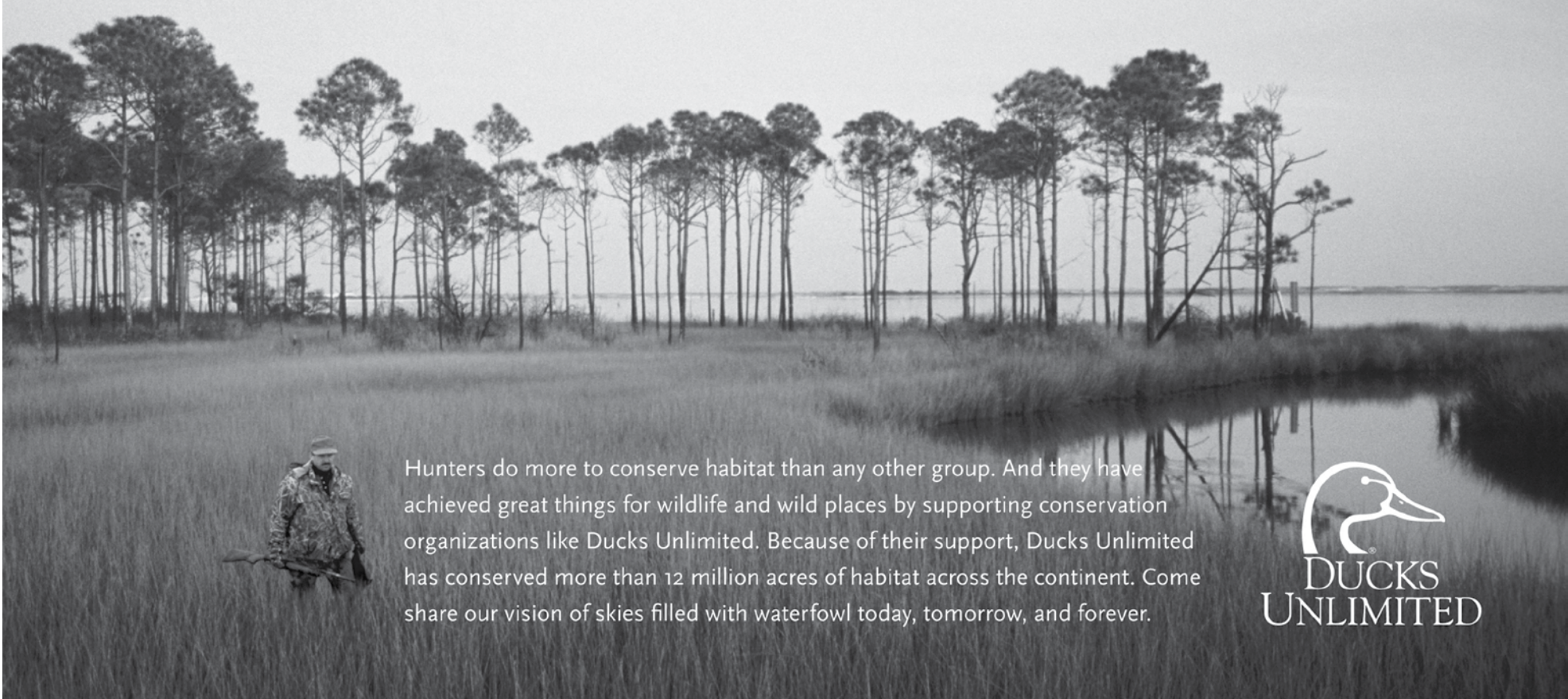


Children and caretakers from the Luke Air Force Base Child Development Center participate in a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona. Purple represents the joint branches and the military children that sacrifice alongside service members across the Department of Defense.



U.S. Air Force Staff Sgt. Britni Thornton, 56th Medical Group non-commissioned officer in charge of core laboratory operations (left), and U.S. Air Force Master Sgt. Keeland Smith, 56th Component Maintenance Squadron lead standardization crew chief hold a sign for their military child prior to a Purple Up parade, April 19, 2024, at Luke AFB, Arizona. April is month of the military child and is dedicated to the recognition and celebration of service members' children. Events like this contribute to increasing quality of life at Luke AFB by honoring the military members and their children.

# hunter: another word for conservationist



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## Chaplain's thoughts ...

### Stewarding Relationships: Keys to Lasting Connections

By Chaplain (Capt.)  
**JEFF RYBOLD**

56th Fighter Wing Chaplain

Ah, relationships — those intricate webs of connections that keep us sane and occasionally drive us up the wall. Whether it's your best buddy, your significant other, or your quirky neighbor who insists on mowing the lawn at 7 a.m. on a Saturday, mastering the art of stewarding relationships is like navigating a minefield with a map made of spaghetti. But fear not! Within this chaplain's corner of wisdom, we will dive into the keys to lasting connections.

First up, let's talk about needs — not yours, theirs! Understanding and meeting the needs of your partner in crime (or love) is as crucial as remembering to charge your phone before a road trip. Everyone's needs are as unique as a fingerprint — some crave quality time, while others thrive on acts of service or words of affirmation. So, whip out your Sherlock Holmes hat and do a bit of sleuthing to uncover what makes your favorite human tick.

Next up, communication — the

peanut butter to the jelly of relationships. Ever tried to assemble IKEA furniture without instructions? That's what it feels like when you don't communicate effectively. Remember, mind-reading is not a skill most of us possess. So, speak up, listen actively, and for heaven's sake, put down your phone during conversations unless you're googling the nearest pizza joint.

What now? Conflict resolution — the rollercoaster ride of relationships. Picture this: you and your partner have differing opinions on whether pineapple belongs on pizza (it doesn't, but let's agree to disagree). Instead of resorting to a full-blown food fight, practice the art of compromise. Take a deep breath, count to 10 if needed, and remember that sometimes, being right isn't as important as maintaining harmony. And hey, if all else fails, offer to order two pizzas — one with pineapple and one without. Problem solved! ...or is it?



U.S. Air Force photo  
Chaplain Rybold

Now, let's talk about the elephant in the room — boundaries. Just like a picket fence keeps nosy neighbors out of your backyard barbecue, boundaries help maintain healthy relationships. It's okay to say no, set limits, and assert your needs. Respect each other's personal space like you respect the last slice of cheesecake in the fridge — with reverence and a dash of fear.

Lastly, sprinkle your relationships with a generous serving of laughter. After all, what's life without a good belly laugh and a side of tears? Whether it's sharing ridiculous memes, indulging in a cheesy rom-com marathon, or engaging in a friendly game of pun war, laughter can be like glue binding relationships together.

In conclusion, stewarding relationships is a delicate garden — it requires patience, care, and the occasional dose of fertilizer (metaphorical, of course). By understanding needs, communicating effectively, mastering conflict resolution, setting boundaries, and embracing laughter, you'll be well on your way with the keys to lasting connections which withstand the test of time. So, go forth, dear friends, and cultivate your relationships like the glorious master gardeners of love and friendship that you are!

### The Medical Group will close early or will be closed on the following dates:

April 10 .. Closing at noon  
April 19 .. Closing at noon  
May 8 ..... Closing at noon  
May 24 ... Closing at noon  
May 27 ... Federal Holiday  
June 12 .. Closing at noon  
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# Using adaptation, mitigation to confront climate change

By  
**MATTHEW OLAY**

DOD News

The Defense Department is actively engaging a two-pronged approach to confront climate change by avoiding the unmanageable while at the same time managing the unavoidable, according to one DOD climate official.

During Earth Day remarks April 22 at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, DOD Climate Resilience Program Director Kate White emphasized how seriously DOD takes climate change amid increased demands on military operations at home and around the world.

"The issue here that we face is that environmental conditions [directly affect] military planning, and they affect every kind of decision making that we do," she said. "For instability, competition and conflict, we have to pay attention to the climate."

To meet the challenges presented by climate change, White explained how DOD is actively pursuing the concept of climate resilience, which refers to the ability to anticipate, prepare for, and adapt to changing climate conditions — while at the same time responding to, and rapidly recovering from, climate disruptions.

In working to achieve such resilience, White said DOD combines the concepts of adaptation and mitigation.



Photo by Navy Petty Officer Jeff Atherton

**Naval Special Warfare operators and Norwegian naval special operations commandos test ice thickness near the USS Hampton submarine in the Arctic Ocean to establish a landing zone for a helicopter during Arctic Edge, March 9, 2024. The exercise is designed to bolster skills in an Arctic environment.**

"When we talk about adaptation, what we're really talking about here is managing the unavoidable changes that are coming," said White.

As an example of this, White mentioned data showing that, even if all greenhouse gas emissions ceased tomorrow, there would still be hundreds of years of rising sea levels and atmospheric temperature changes that would impact the planet.

"We have enough information to adapt now; we don't have to wait for perfect information," said White, comparing making climate adaptation decisions to making decisions on the battlefield.

Turning to mitigation, White said that management of greenhouse gases is a top priority for DOD.

"If we don't do anything about green-

house gases ... the air is going to get warmer and we're going to be facing the same kind of extreme events that we're facing right now."

In preparing for future changes to the climate to maintain climate resilience, White said that it's imperative to look at the widest possible range of models.

"If we're looking at [the models] for decision making, [DOD needs] to know what all of those futures are, so that we can [ensure] that our equipment will work under those conditions, our people will function, our planes will fly, our boats will be able to move at speed," she said.

White provided a series of examples of how recent changes in the climate have directly impacted separate branches of the military, including an uptick of flooding on

U.S. and overseas military installations, thawing permafrost in the Arctic, and a strain on Air Force resources due to an increased demand to fight wildfires.

"You can't adequately prepare for the future if you're constantly reacting to what's going on now," said White.

Moving forward, White said DOD will continue implementing its climate adaptation plan by making "tough decisions" on how to best manage installations that are vulnerable to climate change, working to decrease operational energy use, and supporting innovation.

"We have such innovative people in America, [and] we need to put them to work," said White. "We need to ... support them adequately to come up with the kinds of technological innovations we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

White presented her Earth Day remarks — followed by a brief Q&A — to a group of military fellows who are completing their professional military education at Brown University's Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs. According to the institute's website, the program provides "U.S. and international military officers with the opportunity to spend one year auditing graduate-level courses, engaging in security-related seminars, and participating in security-focused research working group with faculty, students and policy practitioners."



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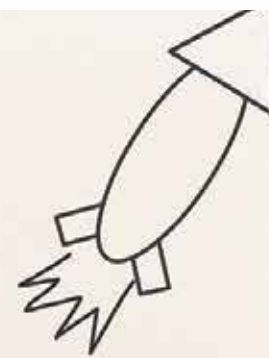
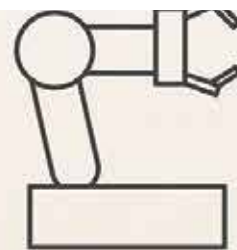
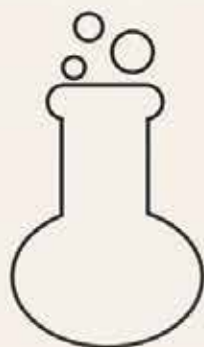
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