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Creech 'Spartans' aid homeless high schoolers during back-to-school season

Throughout the academic year, nearly 7,500 kids throughout southern Nevada attend high school or preparatory programs to prepare them for a future beyond adolescence. They also dream of a future beyond homelessness, hunger, loneliness and despair.

Wanting to make a difference in these children's lives, members of the 867th Attack Squadron at Creech Air Force Base, Nev., recently volunteered to ensure much-needed school supplies were distributed correctly and swiftly to those in need.

On Aug. 4, 2023, squadron members, known as the "Spartans," volunteered to aid Project 150, a southern Nevada non-profit organization that provides no-cost support and services directly to homeless high schoolers.

Led by Capt. Gregory Strasburger, the Airmen packed and loaded an assortment of school supplies from pens and notebooks to shoes and shower kits. The volunteer efforts aided Project 150 to assist them in efficiently distributing items to various schools and educational facilities before the 2023-2024 academic year kicked off.

"How can you do well in school when you don't know when your next meal is coming," said Strasburger, the squadron's project manager. "I wasn't brought up under those circumstances, and I think how rough they have it."

Strasburger mentioned when the squadron searched out volunteered opportunities in the Las Vegas area, Project 150 stuck out to him immediately.

"Once I read the mission statement in how they were helping disadvantaged high school students, I thought that would be a great way for the 867th to pay it forward."

Beyond organizing and moving the school supplies, the Airmen's work also aided Project 150 staff in having supplies readily available at their new, second location in the Vegas Valley.

As the Las Vegas area is rated the number one city in the U.S. for unaccompanied, unsheltered youth, Stacy Chapter, the organization's community outreach manager, said it was a "luxury" to have Airmen from Creech involved in their program.

"It's a luxury for us to have Creech involved, because when they come out, we have projects



Airmen assigned to the 867th Attack Squadron, Creech Air Force Base, Nev., separate school supplies donations during their volunteer efforts at Project 150, Las Vegas, Nev.

that require a lot of hands," said Chapter. "I'm always so impressed when service members take part in our programs because I can hand off a complex task knowing military members are very organized and they get it done."

Project 150's work spans across 75 high schools in south-

ern Nevada, including neighborhood public schools, magnets, and charters. Not limited to just school supplies, the non-profit also provides grocery bags with individual food items for homeless students, ensuring they don't go hungry. They also operate a clothing boutique, allowing students access to back-to-school Air Force photographs by Lt. Col. Brent Warren Airmen assigned to the 867th Attack Squadron, Creech Air Force Base, Nev., pose for a photo during their volunteer efforts at Project 150, Las Vegas, Nev.

shopping that normally they wouldn't have. Project 150 also provides school scholarships for homeless students going to college or trade programs, providing \$250,000 in support for 98 students last year alone.

During the holiday seasons, Project 150 and volunteers also distribute 2,500 turkeys during Thanksgiving and 2,500 hams for Christmas to those in need.

"For many of these kids, school isn't just a place to go to learn," said Chapter, who has worked for Project 150 for seven years. "We work directly with the schools to keep them there through graduation. Because school is their community, it's



Airmen assigned to the 867th Attack Squadron, Creech Air Force Base, Nev., organize donated supplies during their volunteer efforts at Project 150, Las Vegas, Nev. The Airmen volunteered to ensure much-needed school supplies were distributed correctly and swiftly to those in need.

their safe space and a place they can forget they're homeless, even if just for a while."

Strasburger said, at the end of the day, he left feeling good about the support.

"Felt like a very good opportunity to help them out. But I caveat that knowing a lot more needs to be done for these kids."

Members interested in getting involved with Project 150, or donating clothing to support their efforts, can learn more at www.project150.org.

Brandon Act expedites mental health care referrals for Airmen, Guardians

Airmen and Guardians can expect to see an additional referral process for mental health care as the Brandon Act is implemented throughout Air Force and Space Force installations.

The Brandon Act is intended to help identify and get care for mental health concerns by making it easier to access - and required of leaders to take seriously — mental health support by referencing "The Brandon Act" when they need a referral to mental health services.

The Brandon Act is named after U.S. Navy Aviation Electrician's Mate 3rd Class Brandon Caserta, who died by suicide in 2018. Teri and Patrick Caserta, Brandon's parents, have been a driving force in implementing the Brandon Act.

"I spoke with the Caserta family and listened to their experience," said Secretary of the Air Force Frank Kendall. "They bravely shared the story of their son in hopes to help save others. We must honor their spirit and remind every supervisor and leader in the Air Force and Space Force of their duty and legal obligation to help fellow teammates who ask for assistance."

"The path for the Brandon Act has been long," said Teri Caserta. "But as each military service implements the act, it has renewed our hope. A hope that these new rules will save the lives of those who are serving on our behalf."

"As leaders and supervisors learn about the Brandon Act, we hope it lifts the stigma that some have when asking for help," said Patrick Caserta, father of Petty Officer Caserta. "Asking for help is an act of courage and mature judgement — in our call with Secretary Kendall, we believe we have



the right leaders to help lead the change and improve our military and save lives. We want to thank Secretary Kendall for embracing and implementing the Brandon Act. We appreciate the hard work that he has and continues to do for our Airmen and

Guardians." When Airmen and Guardians voluntarily request a mental health referral by contacting their commander or supervisor (in the grade of E-6 or above) it invokes the Brandon Act and expedites the process. Service members may request a referral for any reason, including, but not limited to personal distress, personal concerns or trouble performing their duties. They are not required to provide a reason or basis for the referral.

Courtesy photo

It is mandatory for commanders and supervisors to honor a Brandon Act request.

The Department of the Air Force program will be called the Brandon Act — The Commander/ Supervisor Facilitated Referral Program.

"The care and well-being of our Airmen is always our top priority," said Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass. "I'm encouraged by ini-

tiatives, like the Brandon Act, that ensure our people have multiple paths to seeking care for mental health concerns they are experiencing."

A mental health evaluation referral request can be made by active-duty members at any time and in any environment, including deployed locations. Members can be active duty, in active-duty status as a member of the select Reserve, assigned to a temporary duty station or on leave.

"Few things are more important than improving access to mental health are and every improvement matters," said Chief Master Sergeant of the Space Force Roger A. Towberman.

Once members request assistance under the Brandon Act, their commander or supervisor must contact the mental health clinic and request an appointment for the member the same or next day. The mental health provider will do either a faceto-face, telephonic or telehealth appointment.

A referral under the Brandon Act differs from a commanddirected or independent referral in several ways. A Brandon Act referral is initiated by the service member to their commander/supervisor, while a command-directed mental health referral is initiated by a commander or supervisor and is mandatory. An independent self-referral is handled completely by the member themself.

Additionally, the service is working to develop annual training on how to recognize if someone may need a mental health evaluation based on behavior or imminent danger for commanders/supervisors. The training will also include how a member may obtain a Brandon Act referral that protects their privacy. Further information on the training will be released as it becomes available.

Additional mental health resources include the 988 Veterans Crisis Line, Military OneSource nonmedical counseling, and the 24/7 Psychological Health Resource Center. For more information, visit health.mil/brandonact.



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For all submissions, a name and phone number of a person to contact must be included in the event questions arise.

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Red Flag 23-3: Uniting U.S. armed forces

by Staff Sgt. Sean Hetz Nellis AFB, Nev.

Red Flag 23-3 has come to a close for more than 2,000 U.S. Air Force, Space Force, Marine Corps, Navy and Air National Guard that ran from July 17 to Aug. 4, 2023.

Although it started at Nellis, it concluded with multiple units dispersed to parts of Southern California.

"The last week of Red Flag 23-3 occurred in conjunction with the U.S. Navy," said Col. Eric Winterbottom, 414th Combat Training Squadron commander. "Integrating the Air Force and Navy into a large-scale exercise places an emphasis on joint planning, communication, and execution to enhance interoperability and joint operational effectiveness."

The exercise incorporated realistic scenarios that tested the participants' ability to seamlessly integrate their operations. Joint missions involving U.S. Air Force and Navy assets focused on a range of mission sets, including air-to-air combat, strike operations, and intelligence gathering.

By training together in a simulated combat environment, the U.S. Air Force and Navy enhanced their interoperability and gained a deeper understanding of each other's capabilities and tactics.

"The Department of Defense prioritizes the People's Republic of China as our number one pacing challenge," said Winterbottom. "By training together in a realistic and challenging environment, the Air Force and Navy enhanced their joint capabilities, bolstering the nation's ability to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific."

One of the primary objectives of Red Flag 23-3 was to strengthen the integration between the U.S. Air Force and Navy. With the future of warfighting requiring close coordination between the two services, the exercise provided an excellent opportunity for joint training and collaboration.

This premier large-force employment has always brought multiple branches of the U.S. military together to enhance joint warfighting capabilities. This iteration of Red Flag aimed to foster collaboration and interoperability between the participating services and focused on unique challenges and scenarios.

"As the new commander, my priority for future Red Flag exercises is to ensure realism and relevance," said Winterbottom. "Red Flag will continue to expand into long-range, dis-



U.S. Navy Parachute Rigger Petty Officer 3rd Class Nicholas Bono assigned to the Electronic Attack Squadron 138, from Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Wash., supports the EA-18G Growler mission during Red Flag at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., July 19, 2023. Red Flag 23-3 strengthens integration among joint force partners to maximize strategic capabilities.

persed, Joint and Coalition, peer contested training scenarios. We also train to respond to and effectively deter nation-state threats emanating from Russia, Iran and North Korea, and transnational and non-state actor threats from violent extremist organizations, such as those operating in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Central Asia." Air Force assets, such as the F-35A Lightning II, F-22 Raptor, KC-135 Stratotanker, KC-46 Pegasus, B-1B Lancers and HH-60G Pavehawk worked in conjunction with Navy assets that included the EA-18G Growler and carrier-based aircraft and surface vessels, to develop seamless operational synergy.



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Megan Estrada

U.S. Navy Aviation Structural Mechanic Seaman Apprentice Rylan Manns assigned to the Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 138, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Wash., supports the EA-18G Growler mission during Red Flag at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., July 19, 2023. The VAQ-138 is one of the 30 units from across the DOD participating in 23-3.



An F-16 Fighting Falcon pilot assigned to the 113th Wing, Joint Base Andrews, Md., taxis out for a Red Flag 23-3 mission at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., July 19, 2023. This Red Flag will concentrate on three primary themes: defensive counterair, offensive counterair suppression of enemy air defenses, and offensive counter air-air interdiction.



A B-1B Lancer assigned to the 28th Bomb Wing, Ellsworth Air Force Base, S.D., conducts aerial refueling during a Red Flag 23-3 mission at Nellis AFB, Nev., July 26, 2023. This Red Flag will provide more complex realistic scenarios concentrated on warfighting in the Indo-Pacific theater.

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Nellis inducts new honorary commanders



Air Force photographs by Airman 1st Class Jordan McCoy Honorary commander inductees gather for a group photo at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 18, 2023. The honorary commander program creates opportunities to educate key community members about the missions of Nellis. The honorary commanders program provides an opportunity for Southern Nevada area community leaders and Nellis leaders to exchange ideas, share experiences and foster a supportive relationship with the community.

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Brig. Gen. Richard Goodman, commander of the 57th Wing, gives opening remarks during an honorary commander induction ceremony at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 18, 2023. Airmen gathered to celebrate the induction of new honorary commanders. Honorary commanders help bridge the gap and communicate openly between base officials and community leaders.

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Retired U.S. Air Force Col. Patrick Donley, Ph.D., director of Doolittle Leadership Center, addresses attendees during a leadership symposium at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 14, 2023. Through the provision of expert guidance and shared insights, participants can acquire the knowledge and skills needed to effectively lead teams toward the attainment of their mission objectives, even in the most demanding of situations. The leadership symposium was designed to empower Airmen leaders to take on the challenges posed by complex, multidomain operational environments.

Nellis, Creech host Leadership Symposium



Air Force photographs by Airman 1st Class Jordan McCoy

Leadership symposium attendees gather for a group photo at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 15, 2023. The LCD framework is used to help develop future leaders capable of executing core mission objectives while caring for and promoting the growth of the next generation of Airmen. Attendees were taught leadership lessons based on the lead, develop, care framework from guest speakers who have a passion for investing in the growth and development of our future leaders.



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Capt. Terry Tilgham, a student instructor pilot assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, tracks an F-16 Fighting Falcon from an HH-60W Jolly Green II while it taxis down the flight line at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023.





Photo F

Tech. Sgt. Austin Hennessee, an advanced special missions aviator instructor assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, walks toward an HH-60W Jolly Green II on the Nevada Test and Training Range, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023.



LEFT: An HH-60W Jolly Green II, assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, participates in air-to-air combat training over the Nevada Test and Training Range, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023. 34th WPS' student pilot instructors qualified in air combat maneuvers against fixed wing aircraft.





Capt. Terry Tilgham, a student instructor pilot assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, performs pre-flight inspections on an HH-60W Jolly Green II before participating in routine training at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023.



Capt. Terry Tilgham, a student instructor pilot assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, performs pre-flight inspections on an HH-60W Jolly Green II before participating in routine training at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023. 34th WPS' student pilot instructors qualified in air combat maneuvers against fixed wing aircraft.



Airman 1st Class Lucas Garcia, an aerospace propulsion Airman assigned to the 355th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, is responsible for the aircraft's integrity and the pilot's safety at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023.



Senior Airman Sam assigned to the 34 pre-flight inspection before participatin Force Base, Nev., A

js vs. F-16s





Senior Airman Sam Brown, a special missions aviator assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, performs pre-flight inspections on an HH-60W Jolly Green II before participating in routine training at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023. Special missions aviators ensure the safety of the aircraft and Airmen.

LEFT: Airman 1st Class Lucas Garcia, an aerospace propulsion Airman assigned to the 355th Aircraft Maintenance Squadron, performs pre-flight inspections before launching an HH-60W Jolly Green II at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023. Aerospace propulsion Airmen have many responsibilities and can be tasked to maintain multiple aircraft and engine types.





Sam Brown, a special missions aviator e 34th Weapons Squadron, performs ections on an HH-60W Jolly Green II pating in routine training at Nellis Air ev., Aug. 10, 2023.



Air Force photograph by Senior Airman Zachary Rufus Senior Airman Sam Brown, a special missions aviator assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, ensures the ground is clear for the pilot to land on the Nevada Test and Training Range, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023.

LEFT: Maj. Eric Ruiz, an instructor pilot assigned to the 34th Weapons Squadron, performs pre-flight inspections before participating in routine training at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev., Aug. 10, 2023. All HH-60W Jolly Green IIs have folding rotor blades to improve air transportability and shipboard operations, advancing the ability to project airpower anytime, anywhere.

Next PACT Act deadline: Health care enrollment for veterans who deployed to combat zones

The Department of Veterans Affairs is reminding veterans that, if they deployed to combat zones, they can enroll in VA healthcare.

Veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001 and Oct. 1, 2013 are eligible to enroll directly in VA health care until 11:59 p.m., local time, Sept. 30, 2023.

This special enrollment period gives Veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan, and other combat zones an opportunity to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.

VA encourages all of these veterans to visit VA.gov/PACT or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and sign up for VA health care before the deadline. Veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in overall quality ratings and patient satisfaction ratings. Additionally, VA health care is often more affordable than non-VA health care for veterans.

This special enrollment period is a part

of the PACT Act, the largest expansion of VA health care and benefits in generations. Since President Biden signed the PACT Act into law on Aug. 10, 2022, more than 344,000 veterans have enrolled in VA health care and more than 4.2 million enrolled veterans have been screened for toxic exposures.

"Are you a veteran who deployed to a combat zone but never enrolled in VA health care? If you left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and Oct. 1, 2013, you should sign up now," said VA Secretary Denis Mc-Donough. "Even if you don't need this care now, you may need it in the future – and once you're in, you have access for life. But don't wait — the deadline is Sept. 30 — so go to VA.gov/PACT and apply today."

Although this deadline is written into law for this specific group of veterans, many other groups of veterans are able to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits — including many Vietnam veterans, Gulf War veterans, veterans who deployed to a combat zone and transitioned out of the service less than 10 years ago, and more. Veterans who do not meet any of the above criteria can often still access VA health care by filing for VA benefits or based on income. If a veteran is granted service connection for any health condition, they become eligible for VA care.

President Joe Biden has made supporting veterans a core element of his Unity Agenda for the nation. When the president signed the PACT Act into law, he extended the standard eligibility window for veterans who deployed to combat zones to enroll in VA health care from five years to 10 years. The PACT Act also expanded VA benefits for millions of veterans, making more than 300 health conditions "presumptive" for service connection. This means that if an eligible veteran has one of these health conditions, VA automatically assumes that the condition was caused by the veteran's service and provides compensation and care accordingly. Since the PACT Act was signed into law, VA has delivered more than \$1.85 billion in PACT Act benefits to veterans and their survivors. VA encourages veterans and their survivors to apply for these benefits now at VA.gov/PACT.

More information on eligibility for the special enrollment period can be found at VA.gov/PACT. The period applies to

St. Jude patient Brink

veterans who deployed to a combat zone, never enrolled in VA health care, and left active duty between Sept. 11, 2001, and October 1, 2013 — specifically those who served in a theater of combat operations during a period of war after the Persian Gulf War or in combat against a hostile force during a period of hostilities after Nov. 11, 1998.

VA is executing a nationwide campaign to ensure that as many veterans as possible enroll before Sept. 30. To date, VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,000 events nationwide, \$13 million in paid media, 60,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to veterans, the creation of a one-stop-shop PACT Act website, and more. This is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal in mind: ensure that all veterans — and their survivors — get the health care and benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping veterans and their survivors, visit VA's PACT Act Dashboard. To apply for care or benefits today, visit VA. gov/PACT or call 1-800-MYVA.



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Heritage and History of Nellis AFB

Special Edition of Desert Lightning News Published Friday, September 22, 2023

Nellis began as the Las Vegas Army Air Field in late 1941, hosting the Army Air Corps Flexible Gunnery School which started B-17 gunnery training in early 1942. Reopened in 1949 as Las Vegas Air Force Base, it was renamed the next year in honor of Lieutenant William Harrell Nellis, a P-47 pilot from southern Nevada, killed in action December 27, 1944.

Nellis is a major focal point for advanced combat aviation training. Its mission is accomplished through an array of aircraft, including fighters, bombers, refuelers, and aircraft used for transport, close-air-support, command-and-control and combat search-and-rescue.

This special edition, History of Nellis Air Force Base, will feature historical photographs, stories about how the base came to be, all the major milestones in flight reached there, and the men and women who did not see limitations – only possibilities.

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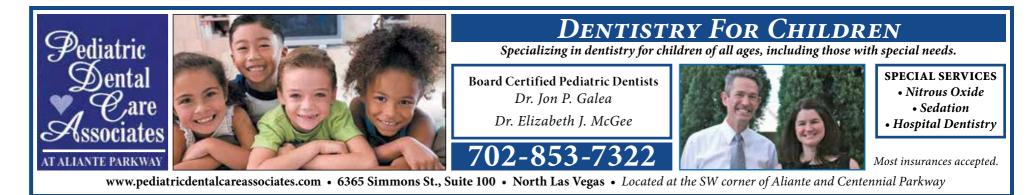
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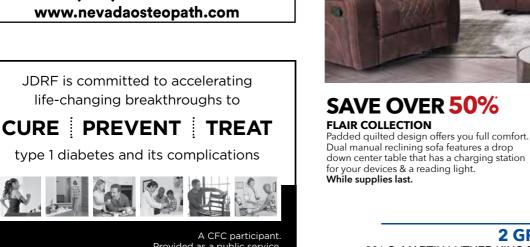




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