

Fort Irwin Soldiers earn diving certification through BOSS

Story by Kimberly Hackbarth

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — Ten Fort Irwin Soldiers earned their Open Water National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) Scuba Certification Sept. 22-24 at Laguna Beach, California.

The certification, through the installation's Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program, spanned three weeks and featured a comprehensive curriculum encompassing eLearning modules, a day of confined water training in a pool, and two days of open water diving at Shaw's Cove in Laguna Beach, according to Capt. Olivia Schretzman, an observer, coach/trainer (OC/T) with Operations Group, National Training Center, and the lead trainer for the event.

Schretzman, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, native, has been diving for over a decade and commanded a U.S. Army Deep Sea Dive Company, helped spearhead hyperbaric treatments for the Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command, and is a NAUI and Deep End Fitness Instructor, she said.

"We built a strong team of professionals with more than 35 years of experience to enable a successful weekend," she said.

Her team included Logan Lundell, a Gold Star family member and NAUI divemaster, Capt. Scott Cooley, a U.S. Army Combat Diver Qualification Course qualified and NAUI master diver, and Capt. Stephanie Gower, a professional Association of Diving Instructors rescue diver and OC/T with Operations Group, NTC.

"Our team is incredibly passionate about teaching and sharing their knowledge of the ocean," Schretzman said. "Diving isn't just a hobby; it's a journey that offers stress relief, weightlessness, and the opportunity to explore a world like no other."

Spc. Samuel Cross, an indirect fire infantryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, participated in the certification and said NAUI and Deep End Fitness Instructor.



Photo by Capt. Stephanie Gower

Capt. Olivia Schretzman, an observer, coach/trainer (OC/T) with Operations Group, National Training Center, instructs students on safe diving procedures during a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program at Fort Irwin, California, Sept. 22, 2023. Schretzman, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, native, and the lead trainer for the certification, has been diving for over a decade and commanded a U.S. Army Deep Sea Dive Company, helped spearhead hyperbaric treatments for the Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command, and is a NAUI and Deep End Fitness Instructor.

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Fort Irwin ACS and FAP host Domestic Violence Awareness relay race



Photos by Kimberly Hackbarth

Fort Irwin Army Community Services and Family Advocacy Program hosted the annual Race & Rally: United to End Domestic Violence relay race and walk Oct. 2 at the Blue Track on Fort Irwin, California, in recognition of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

Many resources, including Family Advocacy Program, are available for Soldiers and family members who have been affected by domestic violence. For a full list of Fort Irwin and National Training Center services, visit: https://home.army.mil/irwin/my-fort/all-services

Fort Irwin plugged in to energy conservation



By Elizabeth O. Bryson

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — U.S. Army Soldiers Capt. Pierce Watson, Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 1st Battalion, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, commander, and spouse, Capt. Prayer Watson, Weed Army Community Hospital, U.S. Army Medical Activity (MEDDAC) training officer, are just one team that is taking full advantage of the

Motorcycle Mentors Boost Biker Safety

By Elizabeth O. Bryson

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — U.S. Army Soldiers from Operations Group, National Training Center (NTC), saddled up for safety Oct. 16, 2023, as they participated in a quarterly check ride to Lucerne Valley with the Motorcycle Mentor Club here.

The Motorcycle Mentor Club promotes safety on post and off,

Motorcycle Mentor Club organizer John Mancer, the Operations Group, NTC, civilian signal communications officer and a U.S. Army veteran, said the voluntary program is important because it helps Soldiers who are at all levels of expertise gain and maintain the knowledge and skills necessary to properly maintain their vehicles and ride safely.

It also provides an opportunity for social engagement among Soldiers who work and

ride together in the Fort Irwin community, he added.

Lifetime motorcycle enthusiast, Sgt. First Class Marvin Rogers, Ghost Team, Operations Group, NTC, psychological operations noncommissioned officer, has been part of the club since January 2023.

"The motorcycle safety program here not only ensures Soldiers are in compliance with Fort Irwin rules and documentation," Rogers explained. " But our quarterly rides let us get a good gauge on where everyone is at as a rider and have a little fun in the process."

Rogers said the rides provided an opportunity to build stronger bonds with his team as well.

"Seriously, it's a great chance to get out with other riders and enjoy the camaraderie and I feel it's my responsibility as a senior NCO to share my knowledge and mentor other riders." Rogers said. "It's all about keeping everyone safe out there."

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by providing peer safety coaches to Soldiers and civilian bikers.







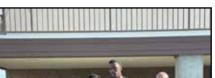
















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High Desert Warrior Staff

Kimberly Hackbarth, Editor

760-380-3073 David Dupree, Staff Writer/Photographer 760-380-8917

Jack Adamyk, Staff Writer/Photographer 760-380-3076

Elizabeth O. Bryson, Staff Writer/Photographer

760-380-4511

Aerotech News

Emma Uribe, Graphic Designer

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the Army provides a very unique workplace environment.

"Our [operating tempo] at Fort Irwin is so high, but there are opportunities like this where you can go out and go on adventures with people who know what they're doing," Cross said. "They connect you with the experts and professionals in those fields and they give you opportunities to grow and learn from them."

Cross said he especially appreciated the eLearning modules.

"It was really awesome to learn about the science behind diving and all the things that happen to your body while you dive and the techniques and stuff you need," Cross, a Fresno, California, native, said.

Cross and other Fort Irwin Soldiers received hands-on training with diving gear at the Oasis Pool, here, from Schretzman and her team before taking the certification in the ocean.

First Lt. Isaac McCurdy, a platoon leader with E Troop, 2nd Sqdn., 11th Armored Cav. Regt., also participated in the certification and said the training in the pool ensured the Soldiers felt confident with their individual skills in a controlled environment.

"They made sure we were all trained on what we were supposed to do in any kind of situation, whether it was our air going out, losing our mouthpiece, getting disoriented, [or] losing our buddy in the pool, so we knew what to do if we went to the water and one of those things happened," McCurdy said. "When we were in the ocean, they actually had a whole bunch of safety measures that worked really fantastically."

Schretzman and her team did a great job planning and executing the event, McCurdy, a Sterling, Virginia, native, said.

"Diving is an inherently risky activity and at no time did we really face any danger at all," McCurdy said. "They did a fantastic job of teaching us how to mitigate risk and making an inherently risky activity quite challenging, fun and safe at the same time."

Cross agreed that the trainers provided a good level of precautions and safety measures, so he never felt like he was in harm's way, he said.

"There were challenging moments, but those moments made me a better diver and it made me more confident in the water," Cross said. "I think they did an excellent job of putting us in situations to challenge us to grow while still maintaining a high standard of safety where everyone was able to grow and develop at their own pace."

BOSS activities give Soldiers at Fort Irwin something to look forward to, McCurdy said.

"Having something really cool to look forward to on weekends really helps us get through some of the rougher times [in the rotations]," McCurdy said. "It's a fun way to add some intention and structure to some of your weekends without making it exhausting."

McCurdy said BOSS and the Army providing opportunities and paying for them is ben-



Capt. Olivia Schretzman (red shorts), an observer, coach/trainer (OC/T) with Operations Group, National Training Center, instructs students on safe diving procedures during a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program at Fort Irwin, California, Sept. 22, 2023. Schretzman, a Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, native, and the lead trainer for the certification, has been diving for over a decade and commanded a U.S. Army Deep Sea Dive Company, helped spearhead hyperbaric treatments for the Department of Defense and U.S. Special Operations Command, and is a NAUI and Deep End Fitness Instructor.



Photo by Capt. Stephanie Gower

Fort Irwin Soldiers prepare to execute confined water diving at Oasis Pool on Fort Irwin, California, through the installation's Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program Sept. 22, 2023.

eficial to the quality of life Fort Irwin Soldiers.

"These guys have so much responsibility and so much work is put on them," McCurdy said. "It's really cool to see that rewarded in ways like this where they get to have experiences ...that they wouldn't have been able to have, especially when they're putting so much on the line to serve this country."

Cross said he would love to see more people get involved in the diving program so those who are qualified could plan additional trips.

"I probably wouldn't have ever pursued something like this," Cross said. "Scuba diving wasn't quite on my radar, but I'm so glad I had the opportunity to do it and I would definitely go out there and do it again."

Cross said BOSS events can create a sense of community that is important for mental health, additionally referencing a run recently conducted on the installation in recognition of National Suicide Prevention Month.



Photo by Capt. Stephanie Gower Fort Irwin Soldiers take a group photograph at Oasis Pool on Fort Irwin, California, after completing the confined water diving training for the installation's Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program Sept. 22, 2023.



Soldiers from Fort Irwin, California, pose for a photograph with their trainers after earning their Open Water National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI) Scuba Certification at Laguna Beach, California Sept. 24, 2023.

"Communities that are connected are going to prevent suicides," Cross said. "The more people who participate in these events, it's going to create a stronger bond and the community aspect is going to be there for everyone and make you feel like part of something bigger than yourself, which you should feel in the Army."

Community is one of the aspects McCurdy said he appreciated about BOSS events.

"I already have a good group of friends here, but I've met some other fantastic guys here during this trip that I really enjoy spending time with," McCurdy said.

BOSS life skills events give Soldiers the opportunity to learn about skills that might be outside their comfort zone, McCurdy said.

"You can get caught up in your niche in the Army and forget that there's a whole world of skills both inside and outside the Army that are worth mastering even if it's just for the sake of being able to enjoy them," McCurdy said.

For Schretzman, the program brings together her deepest passions: teaching, supporting the troops, and building newfound confidence through diving, she said.

"It's our way of giving back and offering you a life-enriching experience beneath the waves," Schretzman said. "Together, we're embarking on a journey of discovery, empowerment, and



Spc. Kuan Liu, a Soldier with 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, executes a front step entry at Oasis Pool on Fort Irwin, California, during the confined water diving training for the installation's Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program Sept. 22, 2023.



Photo by Capt. Stephanie Gower

(From right to left) Capt. Olivia Schretzman, an observer, coach/trainer (OC/T) with Operations Group, National Training Center, Spc. Samuel Cross, an indirect fire infantryman with Headquarters and Headquarters Troop, 2nd Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and Spc. David Crosby, an indirect fire infantryman with 11th Armored Cav. Regt., pose for a photograph during a Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers (BOSS) Life Skills Scuba Open Water certification program in Laguna Beach, California, Sept. 24, 2023.

newfound self-assuredness through the captivating world of scuba diving."

The journey is far from over, according to Schretzman.

"Plans are in motion to conduct more dive programs in the coming year, with the goal of certifying additional Soldiers," Schretzman said. "The invitation is extended to anyone interested in joining the growing community of dive enthusiasts and exploring the captivating underwater world."

The event underscored the commitment to equipping Soldiers with valuable life skills, immersing them in the wonders of diving, and fostering unity and personal growth that transcends their military service, Schretzman said.

"Fort Irwin's Soldiers have dived into new adventures, and the horizon is boundless," she said.

Soldiers interested in future scuba certifications can contact their unit BOSS representatives or visit the Warrior Zone for more information. High Desert Warrior November 2023 Community

Fort Irwin Soldiers earn expert badges

By Elizabeth O. Bryson

Soldiers from across Fort Irwin participated in a trio of testing Oct. 16-20 that took place on Fort Irwin, California, in order to take a shot at earning the Expert Field Medical Badge, Expert Infantry Badge, or the Expert Soldier Badge, depending on their military specialty.

Graded events included marksmanship and weapons maintenance, patrols, a combat fitness test and a 12-mile ruck march with weight, among other challenging trials all designed to be tough, realistic and missionfocused.

Sgt. Steven Arriola, a paralegal with Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), U.S. Army Garrison (USAG) Fort Irwin, earned the Expert Soldier Badge (ESB).

First Sgt. Brian Samaniego, the HHC, USAG Fort Irwin, first sergeant, ESB cadre member and Expert Infantry Badge (EIB) owner, praised Arriola's stamina during training.

"There are no words to say how proud I am," Samaniego said. "He was very committed to this and he showed a lot of drive and determination during training."

Samaniego said Arriola deserved the badge. "He was the only paralegal in the division to volunteer to come out for this and he is the only garrison Soldier that got awarded the badge today," Samaniego said. "He showed a lot of heart."

Arriola, a Bakersfield, Calif., California native and father of two children, has been in the Army four and a half years with this being his first attempt at earning the ESB, which demonstrates individuals' abilities to perform skill level one warrior tasks and brigade commander-selected tasks.

"I am really proud," Arriola said. "This was a great experience...but right now my legs just feel like jelly."







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31 electric vehicle (EV) charging stations that were recently installed on post.

Pierce said he is happy with his electric truck because it's relatively quick to charge, has instant torque, and it can pull all the things he wants to tow.

"I really wanted to be on the leading edge of where this country is going in terms of energy conservation and alternative energy sources," Watson said. "It is even more convenient now with charging stations on post."

Prayer also owns an electric vehicle.

"With skyrocketing fuel prices, and our real desire to help the environment, electric cars are a good choice for us," Prayer said. "We can go away for the weekend and then I can come back and charge easily at Weed [Army Community] Hospital where I work."

Paul Schonenberger, the chief of energy and utilities branch with the Fort Irwin Operation and Maintenance Division, Directorate of Public Works, said Fort Irwin was one of the two Army pilot installations for personal electric vehicle (EV) charging stations and that it has been implemented ahead of schedule and below budget.

"This helped us meet the federal and state of California goals for [electric vehicles]... and it has made life better here for those individuals that live and work here on post that drive them," Schonenberger said. "We also have a number of government vehicles that are plugged into those charging stations on a daily basis."

According to Schonenberger, charging stations are just one part of the ongoing energy initiative here and they have made life just a little easier for EV drivers here at Fort Irwin.

Fort Irwin celebrates Filipino American Heritage Month

Photos by Elizabeth O. Bryson

In honor of Filipino American History Month, Fort Irwin Soldiers, families and community members celebrated the critical part Filipino Americans have played in the history of the U.S. and California as well as their ongoing contributions to the U.S. Army, Oct. 19, 2023, at Sandy Basin Community Center on Fort Irwin, California.

Brig. Gen. Royce P. Resoso, the keynote speaker at the event, talked about his pride in both his Filipino culture and his military service.

The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment hosted the event, which included videos about the role Filipino Americans have played in the U.S. military over time, including interviews with current Fort Irwin Soldiers, cultural displays and dances, cooking demonstrations, a historical book display by the Fort Irwin library, and a feast of tasty food dishes for guests to enjoy.













Fun at Fire Station Four: Fort Irwin Fire Open House

By Elizabeth O. Bryson

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — Fort Irwin firefighters hosted an open house in honor of Fire Prevention Week, sharing safety strategies and fire prevention tips with Fort Irwin community members Oct. 11, 2023, at Fire Station Four, here.

October was also Fire Prevention Month, so first responders on Fort Irwin pulled out all the stops to put a focus on this year's theme, kitchen safety; they hosted community events and visited schools throughout the month in order to raise awareness about one of the most common causes of household fires, cooking.

During the open house, firefighters grilled hot dogs and treated kids of all ages cotton candy, snow cones and giveaways that featured fire safety, including books, stickers and plastic fire helmets.

National Fire Prevention Association mascot, Sparky the fire dog, greeted attendees and posed for photos with families.

Fort Irwin Department of Emergency Services acting director Arturo Calzadillas Jr. was at the event.

"The turnout from the Fort Irwin installation is priceless to us," Calzadillas said. "Each year we get about 400 people at this event... we love having them come meet our firefighters and get to know our first responders as a part of their community in a positive atmosphere."

Fort Irwin firefighters gave participants inside access to the firehouse bay and a variety of fire and rescue apparatus and

hosted activities designed to foster fire prevention in the home. Kevin Murphy, the Fort Irwin Department of Emergency

Services fire prevention chief, was this year's event organizer. "Community outreach is very important to us," Murphy said.

"Our goal is to teach kids safety at a young age so they remember and apply those lessons as they grow up."

Fire prevention team members escorted community members through an educational fire prevention trailer, where they learned about kitchen safety and practiced the proper method to exit a home where fire and smoke are present.

"Most people my age remember the 'stop, drop and roll' campaign... that was very successful in its day and now we have expanded on it with all sorts of learning activities and programs," Murphy said.

Murphy said the goal of the goal is to prevent fires and injuries.

"If you teach children early on you can have an impact for life," Murphy said. "There is simply nothing more important than keeping our children safe."

According to the National Fire Protection Agency, National Fire Week has been observed since 1922 during the week of October 9th in order to commemorate the date of the Great Chicago Fire of 1871; Fire Prevention Month is celebrated annually throughout the month of October.

Flue Shots



Photo by Elizabeth O. Bryson

U.S. Army medical staff from 916th Support Brigade and the Surgeon's Cell, Operations Group, National Training Center, teamed up to give flu shots to Soldiers and civilians Oct. 23, at NTC headquarters building on Fort Irwin, California.

Maj. Daniel Perez, Surgeon's Cell, Operations Group, NTC, brigade surgeon, was the officer in charge of the event.

"Flu shots are an important way to help reduce infectious disease, such as the influenza virus, and maintain force strength," Perez said.

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Fort Irwin hosts National Night Out

By Elizabeth O. Bryson

FORT IRWIN, Calif. — The Fort Irwin Department of Emergency Services (DES) hosted an all-ages event promoting neighborhood safety and cooperation during National Night Out (NNO) Oct. 6, 2023, at the post theater.

DES partners including post law enforcement officers, firefighters and other on-post security departments presented demonstrations and static displays featuring equipment, vehicles, and fire and crime prevention tips aimed at raising safety awareness and strengthening community bonds.

Fort Irwin DES acting director Arturo Calzadillas Jr., attended the event.

"This annual event is a great opportunity for us to collaborate and strengthen our existing relationships with community members and tenant organizations here at Fort Irwin," Calzadillas said.

Calzadillas explained it was also an opportunity to meet families and service members new to Fort Irwin and build trust through positive engagements.

"We want community members to get to know first responders here on post and see them as part of the neighborhood, not just people they encounter only during a crisis," Calzadillas added.

According to the National Association of Town Watches,



NNO was founded as a national community-building campaign that promotes police-community partnerships and camradarie to make neighborhoods safer, more caring places to live.

Lt. Jesse Rogers, Headquarters and Headquarters Co., U.S. Army Garrison-Fort Irwin, provost marshal operations officer, organized the event.

"This is a chance for us to educate the public and show them how we work every day to keep Fort Irwin safe," Rogers said. "We are showing the community why we do the things we do — to keep our neighborhoods as safe as possible."









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National Training Center and Fort Irwin Soldiers participated in the city of Barstow's Mardi Gras parade Oct. 21, 2023 in Barstow, California.

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Lab Inspections at Fort Irwin and Yuma Proving **Ground End with Outstanding Results**

Story and photo by Cherry Langston

Weed ACH Public Affairs Office

In a triumphant conclusion to the bi-annual laboratory inspection, testing facilities and the blood bank under the Fort Irwin and Yuma Proving Ground umbrella have achieved full accreditation. Each boasting an impeccable record with zero major findings.

On Oct. 3, the main lab at Weed Army Community Hospital's facility faced the rigorous scrutiny of the 2023 College of American Pathologists (CAP) inspection and emerged with zero major findings.

The lab demonstrated compliance with an astounding 99% adherence rate, meeting 1,183 out of over 1,200 regulatory requirements.

All identified issues were related solely to documentation, causing no disruption to patient care or lab services.

However, it's worth noting that the inspection team did raise a pertinent concern regarding staffing levels.

On Sept. 13, Weed Army Community Hospital's Blood Bank underwent inspections by both the Association for the Advancement of Blood & Biotherapies (AABB) and CAP, emerging with zero deficiencies.

The WACH Blood Bank achieved a flawless 100% success rate, demonstrating compliance with over 400 regulatory requirements.

The following day marked the 2023 CAP inspection for Weed Army Community Hospital's sister laboratory at Yuma Proving Ground, which yielded only two minor deficiencies.

The facility excelled with a commendable 99.3% success rate, meeting 298 out of 300 regulatory requirements.

These outstanding accomplishments underscore the constant professionalism and yearlong proactivity of Weed Army Community Hospital's laboratory teams.

The stringent reputation of CAP as the most rigorous accreditation body validates each facility for a period of two years. First Lt. Stacy Carter, the Weed ACH lab manager, participated in the inspection.

"Our team demonstrated the absolute highest standard of care and services by passing with a compliance rate of over 99%," Carter said. "Their efforts ensured that all laboratory testing associated with Fort Irwin and Yuma are fully accredited with zero major findings through 2025. It is an honor to lead this team."

With plans to address staffing needs on the horizon, Weed Army Community Hospital remains committed to maintaining



and even surpassing these remarkable standards of excellence.

Lt. Col. Charles Wyatt, the deputy commander for administration said he is optimistic the new fiscal year will yield better results for staffing.

"We are proud of our team's accomplishments," Wyatt said. "Our [administration] team is working closely with the Defense Health Agency and Army Human Resources Command to bring the WACH lab more staff over the next several months. We're committed to this community and will fight for the staff and resources necessary to provide the best possible care to our patients."



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