



## Cavalryman connects with indigenous roots

Story and photos by Elizabeth O. Bryson

**Fort Irwin, Calif.** — Spc. Joe Ochoa, an infantryman with Headquarters Platoon, B Troop, 1st Battalion, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, currently assigned to the 11th ACR Horse Detachment as a cavalryman, is just one of the Native American Soldiers serving here that we would like to recognize during Native American Heritage Month.

Ochoa is originally from the Yakama Nation, Yakama Indian Reservation, Washington, where he lived as a small child; he is both Hispanic and Native American.

Ochoa came to the horse detachment as a novice rider, like most of the Soldiers here.

Sgt. 1st Class Chris Stemple, 11th ACR Horse Det. acting first sergeant, cavalryman and engineer by trade, is an experienced rider himself, but said that was not important when selecting troopers for the horse detachment assignments.

“The most important qualities we look for are a strong work ethic, integrity and character,” said Stemple. “We also want people who have a willingness to learn.”

Stemple explained his Soldiers are required to master the equivalent of three years training in about a 12-month period, a feat they accomplish with the aid of skilled contractors and trainers in addition to the veteran horse detachment troopers.

They not only learn to ride, but become proficient in actual old-school cavalry skills and tactics so they can fulfill their mission as one of the six remaining mounted U.S. cavalry



Spc. Joe Ochoa, an infantryman with Headquarters Platoon, B Troop, 1st Battalion, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, currently assigned to the 11th ACR Horse Detachment as a cavalryman, poses in front of a horse pen at the 11th ACR Horse Detachment barn Nov. 7, 2023.

units, providing ceremonial support for the 11th ACR and representing the rich history of the 11th Cavalry in equine competitions and shows across the country.

Ochoa said working with horses here has

given him a sense of peace and has deepened his pride in his Indigenous heritage.

“It makes me feel closer to my roots, as many of my ancestors were scouts and rode across the wilderness like we are doing here,”

Ochoa said.

Ochoa, who proudly sports the buckle he earned from riding in competitions, said he now prefers to teach and help others over competing.

“I attribute a lot of my success to Puck,” Ochoa said, referring to a recently retired horse from the unit he said helped him build his confidence both inside and outside the ring.

“Puck really taught me a lot,” Ochoa said. “He is a really special horse and he helped me overcome my fear of public speaking and being in front of crowds.”

Prior to joining the Army, Ochoa served in the U.S. Marine Corps for over four years, where he deployed overseas and then worked with the border patrol in support of counter-terrorism and drug-enforcement operations.

Ochoa said one of the reasons he joined the military was because of his pride in the history of other Native Americans who have served, such as the Navajo Code Talkers.

Ochoa said he is proud to be a part of the Yakama Nation.

“My ancestors were in an area that was very wild, but they were able to hunt and fish and live off the land to sustain their way of life,” Ochoa said. “I’m also proud that we’ve maintained our culture over the years.”

Native American Heritage Month is observed in November to call attention to the culture, traditions, and achievements of the nation’s original inhabitants and of their descendants.

## Pasadena students spread cheer at Fort Irwin

Story and photos by Elizabeth O. Bryson

**Fort Irwin, Calif.** — Fifteen students from the Support Our Troops club at La Salle College Preparatory School, Pasadena, California, helped U.S. Army Soldiers, families and community members decorate the town center Nov. 4, 2023, here.

This is the 12th year students from the club have come to help hang wreaths and lights, paint holiday-themed murals on the storefront windows and help decorate the town center Christmas tree.

Alumni director and club advisor Kristen Schultz said the Support Our Troops club



Students from the Support Our Troops club, La Salle College Preparatory School, Pasadena, California, pose in front of one of the storefront windows they decorated at the town center, Fort Irwin, California Nov. 4, 2023. Students from the club work all school year to support service members, veterans, and military and Gold Star families through various activities and fundraisers, including the donation of Thanksgiving food boxes and Christmas trees to the Fort Irwin community.

## Fort Irwin and Silver Valley Unified Schools enter agreement expanding youth programs

Story and photos by Elizabeth O. Bryson

**Fort Irwin, Calif.** — Col. Lane A. Bomar, U.S. Army Garrison Fort Irwin commander, and Jesse Najera, superintendent of schools with Silver Valley Unified School District, teamed up Oct. 31, 2023, to sign a memorandum of agreement that will further enhance Fort Irwin youth programs and bring more resources to the families that use them.

According to Najera, the memorandum involves a grant from the State of California that will allow Fort Irwin to

expand the assistance it offers to families participating in after-school sports, arts, tutoring, early learning and other enrichment programs.

It will also provide additional funding to nutrition assistance services, he said.

“This [will] allow us to expand the programs and increase enrollment assistance offered from about 60 children to an additional 90, potentially,” Najera explained. “It will also allow us to enroll more children in the eight-hour day camps over the summer months and during spring break.”

The agreement also in-



Jesse Najera (left), superintendent of schools with Silver Valley Unified School District and Col. Lane A. Bomar (right), U.S. Army Garrison Fort Irwin commander shake hands after signing a memorandum of agreement at the garrison headquarters on Fort Irwin, California, that will bring more resources to youth programs Oct. 31, 2023.

# Community



## Fort Irwin hosts military mixer

Story and photos by  
Elizabeth O. Bryson

**Fort Irwin, Calif.** — U.S. service members from the Army, Navy, and Marines, along with civilians from the surrounding community, gathered for a military mixer Oct. 24, 2023, in the Sandy Basin Community Center, here, in order to build on existing relationships and form new ones, share experiences, and foster a sense of camaraderie.

The military mixer, which is held annually, offers an opportunity for friends, family and colleagues to mingle with military members from multiple branches while they enjoy food, drinks and entertainment.

A variety of guests from local organi-

zations such as the Barstow Chamber of Commerce and the Association of the U.S. Army (AUSA) attended the event.

Speakers included Renita Wickes, president of the High Desert AUSA chapter, Paul Courtney, Barstow mayor, and Brig. Gen. Curtis D. Taylor, commanding general, National Training Center and Fort Irwin.

Fort Irwin home-based culinary businesses provided a buffet of food and desserts.

NASA, the Fort Irwin archaeological and environmental department, 916th Support Brigade, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, National Training Center Operations Group, Weed Army Community Hospital and other organizations provided static displays to educate guests.



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grows in size every year and the students are delighted to make the trip to help “spruce up” the town center for the holidays.

“The kids just love this,” Schultz said. “This has become a part of our Christmas and it’s just one way the Support Our Troops club gives

back to the community.”

Schultz explained the club works all school year to support service members, veterans, and military and Gold Star families through various activities and fundraisers, including the donation of Thanksgiving food boxes

and Christmas trees to the Fort Irwin community.

Club president Avery Kachmauski, a La Salle College Preparatory School senior, has been traveling to Fort Irwin for a few years now, Kachmauski said.

“We really love coming here

to spread a little holiday cheer and we love seeing all the friendly, smiling faces here every year,” Kachmauski said. “It’s just one small way we can give back to the Soldiers who do so much for us and for our freedoms.”

From **YOUTH**, Page 1

cludes assistance for teen programs and will give more access to foster kids and English-learners who did not previously qualify for financial assistance, Najera said.

Brandi Crist, Fort Irwin Family and MWR director, said she is confident the memorandum is going to improve the quality of life for children on post and give working families a helping hand.

“Right now we have teens at home who are babysitting while their parents and caregivers work,” Crist said. “This is going to give a lot of those teens a chance to get involved in sports and other enrichment [activities] as their younger siblings are able to be enrolled in the after-school daycare programs.”

Crist stressed the importance of structured after-school programs where children

and teens have a chance to learn, develop and enjoy camaraderie with their peers.

“It’s all about giving children more opportunities and making life better for families here at Fort Irwin,” Bomar said during after signing the memorandum.

For more information contact the Fort Irwin Family and MWR office.

### WHO WE ARE

**Brig. Gen. Curtis Taylor**  
Commanding General

**Command Sgt. Maj. Carvet Tate**  
NTC CSM

**Col. Lane A. Bomar**  
Garrison Commander

**Command Sgt. Maj. David Palmer**  
Garrison CSM

**Renita Wickes**  
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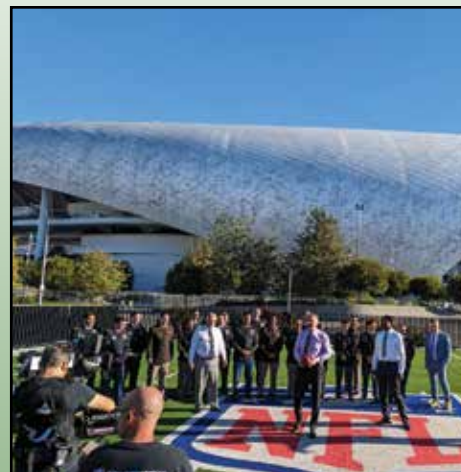
## Joint Color Guard Rams vs. Seahawks Nov. 19



## 2023 Heroes Linked Gala Nov. 17



## NFL Game Day Salute the Veterans Nov. 19



## Community



# Fort Irwin home to only mammal capable of flight

Alexander Moore

Junior Wildlife Biologist, Teya Support Services, LLC

Fort Irwin houses the only mammal capable of true flight, bats. Bats are from the order Chiroptera meaning “hand-wing” and are the second largest order of mammals, after rodents. The order Chiroptera has been divided by scientists into two well-defined suborders: Megachiroptera, the large fruit eating bats and Microchiroptera, the smaller insect eating bats. The bats on Fort Irwin come in various shapes and sizes, the smallest bat being the Canyon bat (*Parastrellus hesperus*) with a wingspan up to nine inches and weighing less than a penny. The largest is the Western mastiff bat (*Eumops perotis*) with a wingspan up to twenty-two inches and weighing 60 to 70 grams. Six additional species of bat can be found at Fort Irwin including the Western red bat (*Lasiurus blossevillii*), the Hoary bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*), the Townsend’s big eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), the Pallid bat (*Antrozous pallidus*), the Mexican free-tailed bat (*Tadarida brasiliensis*), and the California myotis bat (*Myotis californicus*).

Bats are commonly thought of as flying mice however, they are more closely related to primates. Often referred to as creatures of the night and associated with vampires in European folklore, the bad reputation received has even led people to develop a condition called chiroptophobia or the fear of bats. This fear encompasses negative perceptions of bats as disease vectors, pests, or harmful creatures. Bats can tolerate viruses that humans cannot because they have a colder body temperature however, scientists have found no evidence that bats

carry Covid-19. Like other mammals, bats’ bodies are covered in hair except for their wings and hands. Their hands have long slender bones with four flexible digits that enable them to adjust the shape of their wings and change the direction of their flight. The wings consist of a thin membrane, called the patagium, that assists in flying. The patagium extends from the shoulders, around the tips of the fingers, down the inside of each leg, and continues to either partially or completely enclose the tail. The colors, fur texture, and facial appearances seen in bats vary between species.

Bats are important to humans for pollination, seed dispersal, and predation on insects. While some bats feed on nectar, all bats on Fort Irwin are insect eaters. Studies estimate bats eat enough pests to save more than three billion dollars per year in crop damage and pesticide use within the agricultural production industry. Most bat species roost during the day and eat at night. Flying at night protects them from visual predators, exposure to sunlight, hot temperatures, and low humidity. Their natural enemies include great horned owls, peregrine falcons, raccoons, house cats, and snakes. However, humans are the most significant cause of death in bats. Some of the main reasons the populations are at risk are increased land development, loss of habitat, climate change, misguided “pest control” programs, and an infectious disease called white-nose syndrome.

While humans are the most significant cause of death in bats, the Fort Irwin National Training Center (FINTC) does what it can to assist in their protection. Bat and bird friendly gates have been installed on abandoned mines, allowing easy access for bats while keeping humans out. The FINTC has

three established colonies which female bats utilize to give birth, nurse, and wean their pups.

It is important to remember to never touch a bat that appears unable to fly. Left alone, bats pose no threats to humans however, they may bite if handled or captured. All bat species can be infected with rabies; although, rabies in bat populations is estimated to be less than 0.5 percent. There are numerous ways the public can get involved to help mitigate the effects we have on bat species and change the way the world thinks about them. The easiest way to is to learn about bats and share that knowledge with your friends and family. Other ways you can aid in bat conservation include decreasing light pollution (which can disrupt or deter bats from foraging), leaving dead or dying trees in minimally hazardous areas (to be used as roosting sites), erecting a bat house, minimizing the use of pesticides in your yard, and installing a garden to attract insects. Bats are essential to the ecosystem and with the species numbers declining, it is important to do what we can to preserve them.

The Fort Irwin Directorate of Public Works (DPW) has wildlife biologists on staff who are trained to safely manage wild animals creating a safety hazard or nuisance. If you have a wildlife concern, you can reach the DPW government wildlife biologist at 760-380-6435, or Teya contractor wildlife biologist at 760-380-4674. If you encounter a wildlife emergency, please call the wildlife emergency hotline directly at (619) 288-8883. Any issues pertaining to domesticated pets should be directed to the Animal Control Facility at (760) 380-8564. To request insect, rodent, or dead animal removal, contact All-Pro Pest Control at 760-380-4099.

# Education Fair Open House



The Fort Irwin Education Center hosted an education fair open house on Fort Irwin, California, Nov. 14, 2023.

# 2023 Veterans Day



Photos by USAG Fort Irwin Public Affairs Office

The National Training Center and Fort Irwin supported multiple Veterans Day events in Southern California, Nov. 11, 2023.

# News

# Distinguished guests tour the Box at NTC

By Elizabeth O. Bryson

**FORT IRWIN, Calif.**— Over 70 leaders from the business, literary and entertainment fields visited Fort Irwin-National Training Center (NTC) to experience being Soldiers for the day— and to gain an inside look at the vast and formidable Mojave desert training area, known to Soldiers as “the box,” Oct. 11 and 12, 2023, during a Distinguished Visitor Immersion Box Tour, here.

Guests flew in from Las Vegas and Southern California on UH-60 Black Hawks to Fort Irwin’s historic painted rocks, named for the unit insignias branded on the boulders there, and then rode on buses through the desert to the NTC Urban Warfare Center perched high above Tiefert City, where Brig. Gen. Curt Taylor, Fort Irwin-NTC Commanding General, briefed them on the training center’s mission.

“Our job here at the premier National Training Center is to provide tough, realistic training for the Troops and leaders that come here,” Taylor explained.

Taylor stressed the importance of the training, to not only prepare Soldiers to win the first battle of the next war, but to provide every Soldier with the skills and tools they need to do their job and come back home safely to their families.

Next was a display of large scale combat operations featuring Stryker Armored Personnel Carriers, Bradley M1A1 Abrams tanks, a swarm of camera and miles-equipped quadcopters



See TOUR, Page 7

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From **TOUR**, Page 6

(unmanned aerial vehicles) and Opposing force (OPFOR) Surrogate Vehicles operated by Troops from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, whose mission it is to offer a realistic and rigorous opposing force (OPFOR) to the hundreds of thousands of Soldiers that come here as part of rotational training units every year.

AH-64 Apache helicopters UH-60 Black Hawks flown by the 2916th Aviation Bn. provided additional OPFOR and medical evacuation resources for the simulated attack.

After the action, guests walked through Tiefert City and into a market crowded with lively, foreign language-speaking role players and on to a luncheon with Soldiers, where they had the opportunity to sample the infamous military cuisine known as the meal ready-to-eat (MRE) and to get to know the Troops one on one.

Actor Ethan Peck, known for his role as Spock in the television series “Star Trek: Strange New Worlds,” noted he was both surprised and impressed by the emphasis on education and continual learning as Soldiers move through jobs and ranks in the Army.

“It’s a great incentive to succeed and ascend,” Peck said. “The opportunity to gain more knowledge and be exposed to more cultures in the Army is really wonderful.”

Peck said he was also impressed with the sheer size of NTC. “The exposure to the scale of the training possibilities here — and the level of detail with which the U.S. Army... trains are awe-inspiring,” Peck said.

Peck said he would take the sense of camaraderie and family he felt from the Troops at NTC home with him and detailed an encounter he had during lunch, where a Soldier taught him how to choose, open and eat his first MRE.

“To sit with them and hear about how they train... to hear their stories and the emotion behind them — even little things like how they choose their favorite MREs, was a lot of fun,”



Peck said. “Insights like that are really special.”

After lunch, guests were given the opportunity to fire a number of military weapons, check out various military vehicles up close, and were taught room-clearing and other soldiering skills culminating in a patrol lane where they had the opportunity to test their skills by fighting enemy forces.

Josh Conviser, screenwriter and author of the novels “Echelon” and “Empyre,” said he signed up for the experience because he wanted to discover more about the men and women who worked and trained at NTC.

“I learned that this is a fantastic group of people... very dedicated, very motivated,” Conviser said, adding he was impressed by the level of competence and education each Soldier displayed

and how focused they were, not just on their individual jobs, but the evolution of what the military is — and is going to be.

Conviser said he felt the experience would add realism and depth to his future projects.

Valerie Novotny, Executive Assistant to Chairman/CEO at Imagine Entertainment said she participated in the tour because her company is making a film about the Army and she wanted to get a glimpse of what everyday life was like for the Soldiers and families at Fort Irwin.

Novotny said playing “action hero for a day” was a lot of fun, but what really surprised and moved her was how deep and heartfelt her conversations were with the Troops and family members she encountered during lunch and round-table discussions.

“Meeting everyone and learning about the sense of community and how important that is to everyone here,” Novotny said. “Hearing everybody’s stories from their hearts and souls... I am going to take that with me for sure.”

Novotny said she hoped to “sprinkle” those emotions into the upcoming film production.

“They [Soldiers] aren’t just boots on the ground— there are people in those boots,” Novotny said. “They’re complex, they’re complicated... they have their own hopes and fears and dreams. I am very grateful to be able to come here and experience this.”

Fort Irwin offers tours of the premier National Training Center (NTC) throughout the year where visitors can experience firsthand how America’s warriors prepare for deployment by being immersed in a challenging and austere training environment where they encounter civilians on the battlefield, irregular and regular forces, challenging tactical, logistic and strategic problems, and some of the most technologically advanced and elaborate training facilities in the world.

For more information on Fort Irwin NTC tours, visit <https://home.army.mil/irwin/about/visitor-information/ntc-tours>



# Community

## DECEMBER 2023

SUN	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
	<i>Happy Holidays</i>				1 Barstow Tree Lighting (Harvey House) 11 <sup>th</sup> ACR Tank Lighting	2 Holiday Market / Tree Lighting @ Town Center CG Reception Trees Give Away
3	4 Santa Toy Drive Ruck March	5	6	7 FICA Chambers	8	9 11 <sup>th</sup> ACR Holiday @UJEN BOSS Festival of Lights Riverside
10	11	12	13	14 MCSC Mixer/ Grant/ Scholarships Blood Drive SB	15 MCSC Toy Giveaway MWR Facilities Closed	16 MEDDAC Ball BOSS Disneyland Trip
17	18	19	20	21	22 BOSS Christmas	23
16 DEC – 03 JAN 23: BLOCK Leave / SVUSD Holiday Break						
24 MEDDAC Candle lights	25 Federal Holiday	26	27	28	29 BOSS Food Handlers Life skill	30
17 DEC – 02 JAN 24: BLOCK Leave / SVUSD Holiday Break						
<b>National Training Center and Fort Irwin Highlights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ Barstow Tree Lighting (Harvey House): 01 DEC</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ 11<sup>th</sup> ACR Tank Lighting: 01 DEC</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ Santa Toy Drive Ruck March: 04 DEC</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ FICA Chambers: 7 Dec</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ 11<sup>th</sup> ACR Holiday @UJEN: 9 DEC</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ BLOCK Leave / SVUSD Holiday Break: 16 DEC – 03 JAN 23</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ MEDDAC Ball: 16 Dec</li> <li style="width: 50%;">➢ BOSS Disneyland Trip: 16 DEC</li> </ul>						

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**Reservation deadline: Monday, December 4, 2023**  
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