

Legend has it that the moral, welfare and recreation (MWR) tradition was born one rainy cold World War I day, on the front lines in France, when a Salvation Army soldier cooked up the first batch of doughnuts to go with a homesick Arkansas soldier's hot coffee. Since then, civilians have served with the Army, providing essential morale-boosting services.

Of course, during the Revolutionary War, soldiers kept up their own spirits by singing, gambling, racing horses and playing practical jokes while in camp.



In the Army

With more than 37,000 MWR employees worldwide, the Army has established a comprehensive network of support and leisure services designed to enhance the lives of soldiers, active, Reserve, and Guard as well as their families, civilian employees and military retirees.

Some programs are downright exotic, such as programs established at four resorts around the world. Military families can choose to vacation at Shades of Green at the Walt Disney World Resort. It offers



MWR 2007: This is not your father's Moral, Welfare and Recreation program

When you think of MWR services, forget the limited programs your father once was offered. In the last decade, officials in the Armed Forces have given MWR a promotion.

By Hope Katz Gibbs

Civil War soldiers carved pipes from briar root and chessmen from pine. They played baseball, boxed, held foot races, and enjoyed performances by minstrels and comedians.

But during WWI, President Woodrow Wilson decided to create a more formal program to boost soldier morale and established the Morale Branch in 1919. The commission's purpose was to provide facilities and means for entertainment, recreation and education of the thousands of citizen soldiers undergoing training in camps across the country.

Private organizations such as the Salvation Army, the Young Women's Christian Association, and the American Red Cross rushed in to fill the need.

But when the war ended, funding stopped and the programs were mothballed. It wasn't until July 1940 that the Morale Division—later named Special Services—

was established within the Adjutant General's Office.

Between 1946 and 1955, the core recreation programs were established and staffed by a combination of active duty military and civilians. Until the mid-1980s, active-duty enlisted soldiers and officers held military occupational specialties in the Special Services and were assigned at every level of command. As those occupational specialties were discontinued, civilians continued to operate MWR programs with military oversight.

Today, MWR programs are part of operations in every branch of the military to help families with everything they need to stay healthy. And each branch's MWR programs are open to any member of the armed forces, and many are available to civilian employees of the DoD and military retirees.

586 spacious rooms, a championship golf course, and Disney World is nearby. Luxury accommodations are also available the Edelweiss Lodge and Resort in Germany, the Hale Koa Hotel in Hawaii, and the Dragon Hill Lodge in Seoul, Korea.

Another action-packed initiative is the Army's MWR 2006 Fantasy Football promotion. Most recently, Spc. Anthony Owens played a masterful game in Fort



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Irwin, Calif., and won a high-definition television for his efforts.

Children are another focus of the Army's MWR services. The Child and Youth Services (CYS) team offers an array of fun and education programs at 400 facilities and 2,800 family childcare centers worldwide. The program goes beyond providing clean, well-staffed centers. Leaders also attend to the emotional needs of children.

In 2005, for instance, dozens of copies of *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn were purchased from the Child Welfare League of America. The book focuses on the feelings that a parent and child have when he leaves for the first day of school, but Army officials realized it could be easily adapted to help children stay connected with deployed parents and work through the separation.

CYS has also set up Youth Technology Labs at

bases throughout the world. The initiative helps increase communications with deployed parents. Labs include hardware, software, print and electronic curriculum designed for children and youth between the ages of 6-18 years. The labs also provide a unique place for kids to learn more about technology and how it is integrated into the world around them.

The Navy's program

The Navy's MRW division administers programs designed to provide active-duty, Reserve and retired Navy personnel and their families with an assortment of healthy, fun programs. Fitness and sporting offerings top the list and include baseball and softball leagues, bowling tournaments and dance classes.

Programs for children also are essential to the Navy's MWR initiative. And at the Naval Air Station on Whidbey Island in

Washington state, both goals are accomplished at the regional fitness centers. A family fitness room, situated inside each fitness center, gives parents the opportunity to work out while watching their kids. There is a crawler section for babies 6 weeks to 18 months, a toddler section for children up to 18 months, and a section for kids up to 9 years old.

At the MWR program in Hawaii, Navy personnel are invited to Come In To Get Out, with day trips that include hiking, surfing, snorkeling, spear fishing, kayaking, and mountain biking. Equipment, guides and transportation are included.

And single sailors there can participate in several programs geared for the unmarried. Offerings for the spring of 2007 include a hike and lunch on Diamond Head, a Spring Poetry Slam, and a Poor Boy Barbeque. Such programs are generally free or cost a nominal fee.

MWR and the Marines

From bowling alleys to skeet shooting ranges, there are plenty of on-base resources available to marines and their families.

Some programs include travel opportunities offered to active-duty members and their families by airline, bus, railroad, hotel and car rental companies. In some cases, discounts are as much as 50 percent off regular prices.

Aero Clubs are another exciting opportunity, for participants can learn to fly via courses certified by the Federal Aviation Administration. Aircraft can be rented for pleasure or for travel to temporary duty stations. The clubs also sell flying-related accessories.



Finding great programs to offer Marines is, of course, the goal of the MWR program, and those who help accomplish this mission are rewarded. Last year, three officers were honored by their peers for outstanding achievement and exceptional contributions to the MWR profession: Richard N. Milano, Deputy Assistant Chief of Staff; John Van S. Nishida, Director, Business Operations Food and Hospitality; and Patrick M. Highers, Single Marine Program Coordinator.

Air Force Services

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., the Air Force MWR services department was established in 1993. It provides combat support to commander and community service programs that enhance the quality of life for Air Force members and their families.

Mission-essential programs include fitness centers, intramural sports and libraries. Community outreach offerings include child development and youth programs, pools, and skills development.

Additionally, there are golf courses, bowling, and base restaurants.

The Air Force MWR also offers a career program that deals with three areas of the civilian work force: the career executive force (those currently working in SVS Career Program-covered positions), the general work force (those eligible for referral to Career Program positions), and the Management Trainee (those in entry level, development positions managed by the Career Program).

