

## **April —Military Child Month**

April has been designated as the month to recognize and applaud military children for the daily sacrifices they make in supporting America's Armed Forces.

It has long been recognized that the frequent moves and deployment of parents can take its toll on children's work in school. In January of 2011 President Obama issued a directive, "Strengthening Our Military Families," that proposed ways to help these children get the best public education possible.

In an attempt to better understand the challenges of the military lifestyle, the majority of our high school teachers have participated in "The Day In the Life"(of a soldier) training offered at Ft. Riley. Our schools are also participating in the military's Adopt-A-School program; our partnership is with the 1-63 AR Battalion. This program is designed to foster a better understanding of the community's school system, strengthen and improve school programs and curricula, and create a sense of personal involvement and interaction between the military and public schools.

Abilene Schools are also creating a link on our website just for military families looking to move to this area. We are fortunate that Suzanne Polk, a para professional at Abilene Middle School and a military wife, has agreed to be an on-line contact person in our district for military families interested in living in Abilene. She and her husband, Mike, have been members of our community for the past seven years and have two sons that graduated from Abilene High School. Mike, a Combat Aviation Brigade Safety Officer, completed two tours in Iraq, totaling 27 months, while his family remained in Abilene.

I asked them about their experiences in our community. From the beginning, even before they moved to Abilene, they were impressed. When Mr. Wilson, principal at Abilene Middle School, discovered the boys would arrive in town after school had started, he and his staff pulled schoolwork for the boys to complete during their transition. An AMS staff member even alerted the family to temporary housing and they were able to move to the community before their home was ready for occupancy. A great example of a small town working together to welcome a new family!

Mike went on to say that while deployed, he was able to listen to his sons' games on KABI radio via the Internet. His sons were actively involved in basketball and football and there was one night he will never forget. Both boys were having a tremendous game and the radio announcer did a "shout out" to Mike who was then stationed in Iraq. This meant a lot to him and is again an example of community caring.

He also told me, "Abilene's small town atmosphere is tremendous. We may even look to retire in this community."

I also know that we have had coaches that will put games on a program called HUDL so that deployed parents can see them, in their entirety, on the web. On more than one occasion Abilene High School principal, Ben Smith, has dialed up deployed parents on Skype so they could participate in their child's graduation.

At present we have 151 military students enrolled in Abilene Public Schools.

There are 131 military families that live in Abilene along with many retired veterans. I think I can speak for both the Abilene schools and community in thanking military children and families for their service and their sacrifices. We will continue our efforts to do whatever we can to help children of military families.