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Web Site a One-Stop Source for Military Families

By Karen Jowers; Times Staff Writer

A new Web site allows service members and their families to access a wealth of information on programs, services and benefits in the military community with just a few mouse clicks.

With the launch of www.military_homefront.dod.mil, defense officials aim to simplify the search for information on programs ranging from golf courses to spouse employment, and issues from domestic violence to helping a child deal with death.

Much of the information was already available, but scattered across numerous official sites. The new site serves as a one-stop gateway, pulling all the data together and adding some new twists, such as family forums.

The portal is designed to serve all active, reserve and Guard troops and families, whether they are military newbies or seasoned veterans, said Rebecca Posante, program manager for Military Homefront in the Pentagon's office of military community and family policy.

Information from or links to 29 different Defense Department quality-of-life Web sites have been incorporated into the new portal. It also provides links to other agencies such as the Defense Finance and Accounting Service "myPay" site. Those who can't find answers by browsing can link to Military OneSource.

Features of the new portal:

- Sections for troops and families, commanders and quality-of-life program officials.
- Family forums. Families learn most from other families, Posante said, and this offers them a "virtual forum." One of the first questions, she said, was from a family moving to Hawaii who wanted input from other families about school districts to help them decide where to live.
- Directories of phone numbers and locations for family centers, child development programs, youth programs and family advocacy programs, under the "points of contact" button on the home page. These can be searched by installation, service, state or country.

- Glossaries. Acronyms, often the bane of a military newcomer's existence, are defined. Troops and family members can submit acronyms and terms that are not already in the glossary.
- Subscriber lists. Users can sign up to get e-mail notifications when something new pops up in their area of interest.

A far-reaching search engine that can scan the Military Homefront site as well as 100 other military sites that are key sources for information on quality-of-life topics. Visitors also can tap into other search engines such as those for Tricare and the Department of Defense Education Activity.

Military Homefront is a work in progress, and officials want to hear from those who use it. "We really think the site is going to get better based on people's input," Posante said.

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