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OBSERVATION POST

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Ret. Marine improves swimming stamina

Lance Cpl. Paul S. Martinez
Combat Correspondent

In the early hours of the day, a swimmer prepares to fulfill a goal. Unfortunately, his teammates are not with him, but he doesn't hesitate to start anyway. There is little time for toe-dipping or getting a comfortable feel of the water by splashing it on the face. The chilly, 43-degree weather may attempt to intimidate him, but a much hotter fire inside ignites a semper faithful immersion into the water.

Don Tolbert, systems integration officer, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, underwent an 8-mile



LANCE CPL. PAUL S. MARTINEZ

Don Tolbert, systems integration officer, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, undergoes an 8-mile swim at the Training Tank in the early hours of Thursday.

swim at the Training Tank to work toward increasing his personal standards in swimming endurance.

"Last year, we did a 5-mile race," Tolbert said. "We began in September and worked, increasing the miles from there. We're working up to swim 10 miles next month."

Tolbert, a retired Marine, along with fellow swimmers, completed a 7.4-mile swim last month to celebrate the 238th birthday of the Marine Corps.

Now, with his eyes set on swimming an even longer distance, he targets eight miles. In a 50 meter swimming pool, this required no less than 129 laps, a daunting task that demanded strategy.

"Once he gets moving, he keeps the consistency going," said Gunnery Sgt. Jose Valdez, systems integration chief, MCCES. "He picked up on swimming articles to help himself in the water, and discovered that some swimmers

See **SWIM** page A7

WONDER VALLEY Clean-Up



LANCE CPL KASEY PEACOCK

Sgt. Jason Syvrud, rifleman, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, transfers garbage from his vehicle to a dump truck during a community clean-up effort in Wonder Valley, Calif. Dec. 14.

Marines gather for community effort

Lance Cpl. Kasey Peacock
Combat Correspondent

More than 40 community volunteers teamed up with various Marines within 7th Marine Regiment, to clean up debris left from illegal dumping throughout the desert in Wonder Valley, Calif., Saturday.

During a city council meeting, residents of Wonder Valley recognized the issue of illegal dumping throughout the area and were granted money from the county for garbage bins and necessary equipment to help cleanup the areas.

In an attempt to preserve the community, Marine volunteers from the Combat Center came with their own trucks hauled more than 20 loads of debris from illegal dumping sites throughout Wonder Valley from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m.

"The Marines are a wonderful resource that we have here in the community," said Max Rossi, Wonder Valley representative. "Without the able-bodied men and woman from the Marine base, this would have been tough to do given the elderly population in our community, and we are extremely grateful for their contribution here today."

To further show their appreciation, food and drinks were provided for the Marine volunteers throughout the work day.

"I hate seeing the desert get trashed," said Cpl. Zachary Leeds, rifleman, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, 7th

See **CLEAN UP** page A7

CHEF OF THE QUARTER



LANCE CPL. ALEJANDRO BEDOYA

Marine, civilian chefs compete

Lance Cpl. Alejandro Bedoya
Combat Correspondent

Combat Center Marine and civilian chefs fired up their grills and competed in the Chef of the Quarter Competition at Phelps Mess Hall Wednesday. The chefs were tested in three different aspects of culinary arts.

"This competition gives these chefs a chance to prove that food is more than fuel for the body," said Maj. Eric Dominijanni, competition judge. "It is an art, but these chefs have to prove they know their stuff."

The competition started with four teams. The first day of the competition, the chefs participated in a test focusing on basic culinary knowledge such as temperatures and

See **CHEF** page A7

1ST TANKS Christmas



CPL. D. J. WU

Santa Claus and his elves travel down Del Valle Road on his way to the 1st Tank Battalion holiday party Wednesday. Santa and the tank parade is a battalion tradition.

Santa Claus brings holiday cheer to tank battalion

Cpl. D. J. Wu
Combat Correspondent

The 1st Tank Battalion family came together to celebrate the season with its annual holiday party at the unit's tank ramp Wednesday.

The battalion was joined by Santa Claus, who arrived at the party with a tank as his sleigh and nine motorcycles as his reindeer. Santa rode through the Combat Center on Del Valle Road, bringing holiday cheer throughout the base.

"It is a rare opportunity to bring our entire battalion together as a family," said Jany Wasdin, family readiness officer, 1st Tanks. "It's a chance to bring everyone together and build camaraderie."

1st Tanks children took the opportunity to take photos with Santa and tell him what they wanted for Christmas. Marines relished the time together with their battalion brothers before the holiday season.

"Luckily 1st Tanks is good friends with Santa," said Lt. Col. Gregory Poland, battalion commander, 1st Tanks. "You really can't beat rolling into a party on a tank. I'm just glad to have the whole battalion here to enjoy the time together."

Hey Combat Center fans!

Let us know what you think of the Observation Post and what you'd like to see more of with a quick survey at:

surveymonkey.com/s/9CVHK2R

TOP 10 SAFETY TIPS for Driving in the cold

A message from the American Red Cross

Bitter arctic air and a winter storm system are putting most of the country in a deep chill through the weekend with major ice storms, power outages and temperatures 10 to 30 degrees below normal. The American Red Cross has 10 ways people can stay safe during the deep freeze.

1. Wear layers of light-weight clothing to stay warm. Gloves and a hat will help prevent losing your body heat.
2. Bring pets indoors. If they can't come inside, make sure they have

enough shelter to keep them warm and ensure they can get to unfrozen water.

3. Protect your pipes by running water. Even at a trickle, it can help prevent your pipes from freezing. Open the kitchen and bathroom cabinet doors to allow warmer air to circulate around the plumbing. Be sure to move any harmful cleaners and household chemicals out of the reach of children. Keep the garage doors closed if there are water lines in the garage.

4. Keep the thermostat at the same temperature day and night. Your heating bill may be a little higher, but you could avoid a more costly repair job if your pipes freeze and burst.

5. If you are using a space heater, place it on a level, hard surface and keep anything flammable, such as paper, clothing, bedding, curtains or rugs at least three feet away. Turn off space heaters and make sure fire-place embers are out before leaving the room or going to bed.

6. Never use a stove or oven to heat your home.

7. If you are using a fireplace, use a glass or metal fire screen large enough to catch sparks and rolling logs.

8. Use generators correctly and never operate a generator inside the home, including in the basement or garage.

9. Don't hook a generator up to the home's wiring. The safest thing to do is to connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator.

10. Download the American Red Cross First Aid Application for quick, expert advice on what to do in case of an emergency. This free application is available on the Apple iTunes or Google Play stores. See all Red Cross applications at redcross.org/mobileapps.

For more information on how to stay safe this winter, visit the winter storm safety information available on this web site.

MARTIAL ARTS INSTRUCTORS COURSE

Students who successfully complete the course will be a minimum of a Green Belt Instructor. In order to take the course, students must be a corporal or above, with a Gray Belt.

Where: Martial Arts Facility (Building 1652)

When: Jan. 10 to 31

For more information contact Staff Sgt. Fulgencio at (760) 830-0290

BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS

EDEN JOANNE APPLEBY
Born on: Dec. 8, 2013
Born to: Weston and Brandy Appleby

MATTHEW GERALD WEEKS
Born on: Dec. 3, 2013
Born to: Kevin and Dominique Weeks

ALEXIS JANICE JOHNSTON
Born on: Dec. 6, 2013
Born to: Alec and Kaylee Johnston

ZOE NETIRI SNELL
Born on: Dec. 2, 2013
Born to: Damien and Marquite Snell

KIMBER MAY CUMMINS
Born on: Dec. 4, 2013
Born to: Jacob and Samantha Cummins

EDEN JOANNE APPLEBY
Born on: Dec. 8, 2013
Born to: Weston and Brandy Appleby

GIORDANA VIOLETA IGNACIO-RAMOS
Born on: Dec. 3, 2013
Born to: Juan Ramos Jr. and Clarissa Ignacio

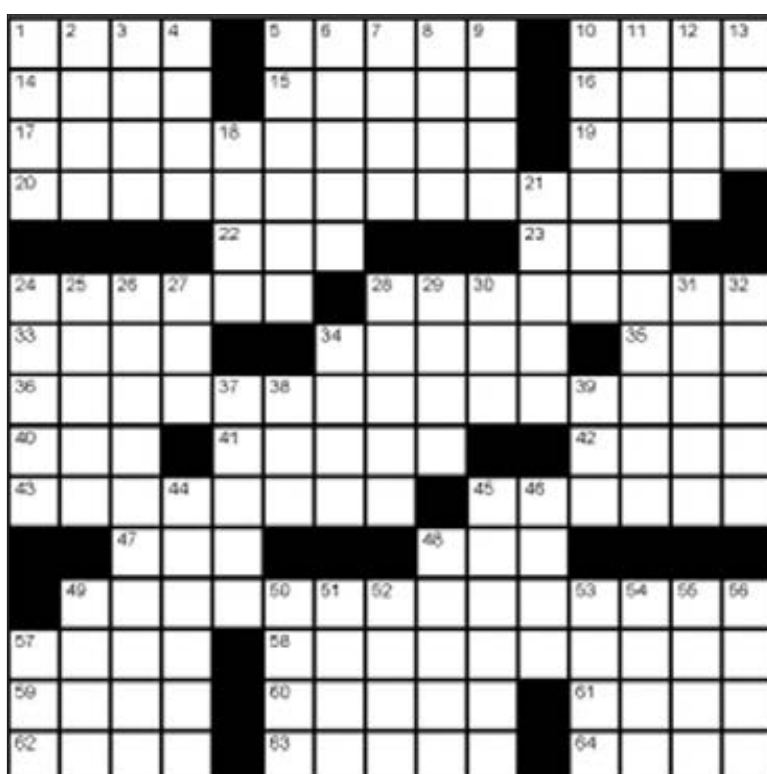
 Visit the official MCAGCC facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/thecombatcenter>

 The Combat Center has its own YouTube channel. Find it at <http://www.youtube.com/user/CombatCenterPAO>

 The Combat Center has its own Flickr photo and video streams. Find them at <http://www.flickr.com/thecombatcenter>

THE FAB FOUR TIMES TWO

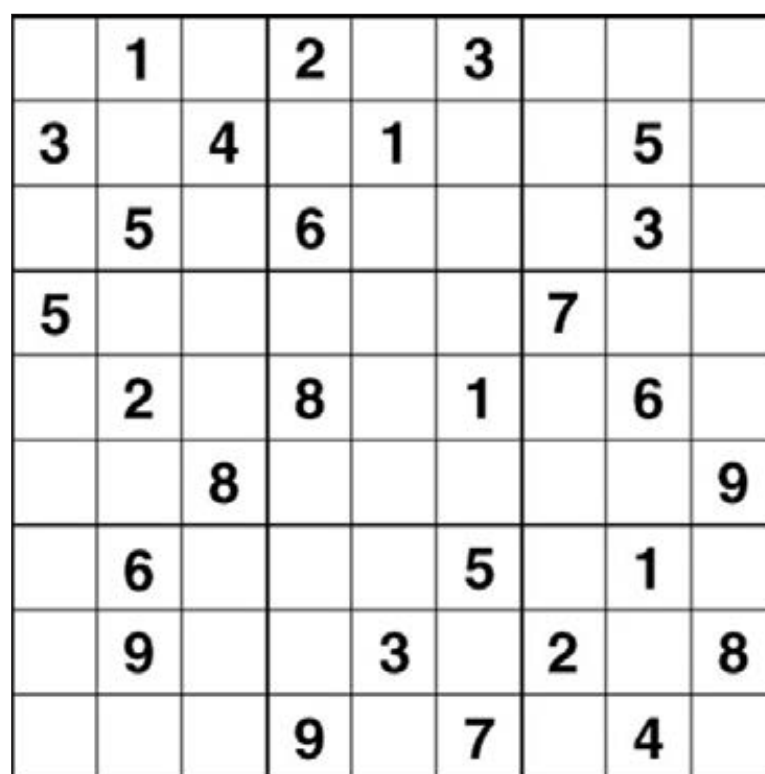
- Across**
- 1 School subject
 - 5 Wore
 - 10 Snakes on the Nile
 - 14 Felipe of baseball
 - 15 Mozart work, sometimes
 - 16 Only Huxtable boy, on "The Cosby Show"
 - 17 Some citrus fruits
 - 19 Cafeteria holder
 - 20 Beatles song about their apparent favorite number
 - 22 Perfect score, often
 - 23 Business "pay me" notice: abbr.
 - 24 Beliefs
 - 28 ___ choice (baseball play)
 - 33 Land measurement
 - 34 Arm bones
 - 35 Luau dish
 - 36 Beatles song about the square of their number
 - 40 Shooting org.
 - 41 Argon and krypton
 - 42 Provoke
 - 43 Oregon Trail folks
 - 45 ___ crust (outer layer of our planet)
 - 47 ___ Paulo, Brazil
 - 48 USNA rank
 - 49 Another Beatles song about their
- number**
- 57 Horse's pace
 - 58 Introvert, perhaps
 - 59 Latin for "I forbid"
 - 60 Take time to enjoy
 - 61 "Tickle-me" craze of the mid-90s
 - 62 Explorer Hernando de ___
 - 63 America, familiarly
 - 64 Country star Jackson
- Down**
- 1 Defeat, in chess
 - 2 Jai ___
 - 3 Handle food with a certain serving tool
 - 4 Grant of "Love Actually"
 - 5 Masses
 - 6 Pertaining to bees
 - 7 Say it isn't so
 - 8 Mined materials
 - 9 Space shuttle org.
 - 10 Make an appearance
 - 11 Third-largest city in Louisiana
 - 12 Mountaintop
 - 13 ___ sauce (it's used in Japanese cooking)
 - 18 Singer James
 - 21 Aviation pioneer Post
 - 24 Daybreaks
 - 25 Dark yellow tint
 - 26 "My heavens!"
 - 27 Guys
 - 28 Swatted insects
 - 29 "Need You



- Tonight" rock group
- 30 Chow down on
- 31 Not smooth
- 32 Begets
- 34 Superpower
- 37 Eskimo house
- 38 West of film
- 39 Cat's cover 44 Pirate
- feature, often
- 45 Mystery awards
- 46 Amo, amas, ___
- 48 "___ Like It" (Shakespeare comedy)
- 49 Popular cookie
- 50 "Hey!"
- 51 Colorado neighbor
- 52 Stash away some cash
- 53 Perlman of "Cheers"
- 54 Ken or Barbie
- 55 Actress Samms
- 56 Light stuff
- 57 Sets in the living room

See answers on page B4

SUDOKU 3124D



Whatever you're looking for, you can find it in the **Observation Post Classified section**

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OFF-LIMITS ESTABLISHMENTS

MCIWest off-limits establishments guidance prohibits service members from patronizing the following locations. This order applies to all military personnel.

- In Oceanside:**
- Angelo's Kars, 222 S. Coast Hwy, Oceanside, Calif., 92054
 - Angelo's Kars, 226 S. Coast Hwy, Oceanside, Calif., 92054

- In San Diego:**
- Club Mustang, 2200 University Ave.
 - Club San Diego, 3955 Fourth St.
 - Get It On Shoppe, 3219 Mission Blvd.
 - Main Street Motel, 3494 Main St.
 - Vulcan Baths, 805 W. Cedar St.

- In National City:**
- Dream Crystal, 15366 Highland Ave.
 - Sports Auto Sales, 1112 National City Blvd.

Local off-limits guidance prohibits service members from patronizing the following locations.

- In Twentynine Palms:**
- Adobe Smoke Shop, 6441 Adobe Rd.
 - STC Smoke Shop, 6001 Adobe Rd.
 - K Smoke Shop, 5865A Adobe Rd.
- In Yucca Valley:**
- Yucca Tobacco Mart, 57602 29 Palms Hwy.
 - Puff's Tobacco Mart, 57063 29 Palms Hwy.

- In Palm Springs:**
- Village Pub, 266 S. Palm Canyon Dr.
 - Whispering Palms Apts., 449 E. Arenas Road
 - NYPD Pizza, 260-262 N. Palm Canyon Drive

For the complete orders, but not off-limits, check out the Combat Center's official website at <http://www.29palms.marines.mil>

WHAT I'VE LEARNED

C.J. EPSTEIN

Phoenix, Ariz. chiropractic intern, 24



> **I was born** and raised in Phoenix and from there, I moved to Tempe, Ariz., for college at Arizona State. Then I went to San Jose, Calif., for chiropractic school.

> **I had a good life** growing up; two parents who loved each other and a happy family. (I was really into) soccer. I started playing when I was three. Being a professional soccer player had been my dream since then until I was, probably, close to high school when I started realizing that I actually wasn't that good and it probably wasn't going to happen. I finally noticed all the little hints my parents had been dropping over the years that maybe I should look into something else.

> **In senior year** of high school I was trying to figure out what I wanted to major in in college. I thought to myself, "What do I want to do for a living?" I knew I wanted to work in some sort of athletic field but not necessarily be an on-the-field kind of doc. I wanted to work in an office and being my own boss was definitely something that appealed to me as well as making a decent salary. So I came up with chiropractic. I became a patient and started shadowing a chiropractor in town and fell in love with it.

> **I didn't realize how much** I liked Phoenix and Arizona in general until I moved away. The weather does get extremely hot there, much like Twentynine Palms, but it's nice year-round. You could essentially be outside all year long if you don't mind the heat in the summer. It's a good scene and a young crowd that lives there, especially near the universities. It's a lot of fun.

> **There actually is** snowboarding in Arizona. Two hours north of Phoenix there's a place called Snow Bowl. It's a small, small mountain where I learned to snowboard.

> **I was always okay academically.** I always got A's and B's. More A's than B's.

> **Early on, I always tried** really hard. My parents always pushed us to do well. My older brother is a genius. He aces tests without even trying whereas I was always big on doing all of my homework and had a harder time on the tests.

> **When I got into college,** I saw that it was usually two or three tests and almost no homework and that's it. That's your grade. So I got really, really good at taking multiple choice tests. I just figured out that my strategy was to study hard beforehand, practically cram but don't pull all-

nighters and then on the test not to second-guess myself. If I knew the answer, I would circle right away and never look back. It definitely worked. The last two years of undergrad I got a 3.9 and 3.92.

> **The last part of chiropractic school** definitely got harder. The classes were longer and the tests were harder, but I've always made sure to keep an active social life. I've always thought that the moment it doesn't become fun anymore, because I'm studying too much, was when I should stop.

> **I was in my 12th quarter** of chiropractic school, and normally we would do a clinic there, but they started these internships with the Department of Defense and the (Veterans Association.) I've had a few friends say great things about it, so I decided to take advantage of the opportunity.

> **I chose Twentynine Palms** in particular because I'm planning on moving to San Diego and being here gave me the opportunity to go down there and shadow a few doctors.

> **At first, I really didn't know** what to expect but now that I've been here for a few months, I see that all of our patients have been super respectful and nice. They really care about the work that we're doing and that we're actually there to listen and help them. That (appreciation) has really been the best part.

> **Here, I get a chance to work** a population that is already active. They want to be healthy so they'll do their at-home exercises to be able to get better and get back to the things they are supposed to do.

> **We work with neurological,** muscular and skeletal problems. We don't use any drugs or surgery, so we can't prescribe, puncture the skin, or work with any broken bones or fractures. We specialize in preventative healthcare; ways to help you be a healthier person and prevent getting sick in the first place.

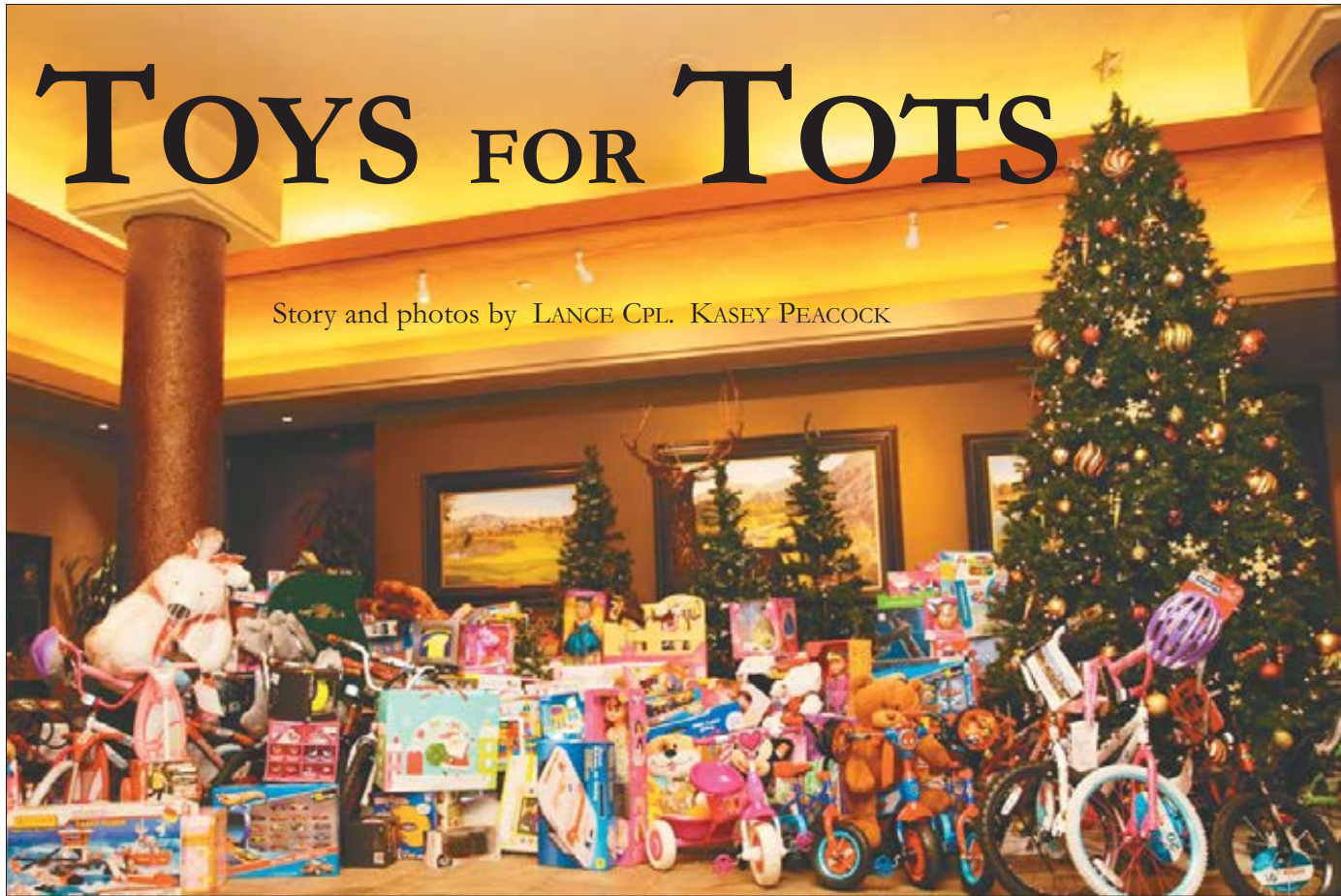
> **The general population** typically comes to you, and they expect to get better immediately but they don't always take an active role in their health. They might get adjusted and then feel better but they won't. To become fully healed from an injury, a patient needs to do some of the work on their own. I've found that the military personnel here are very willing to put in that work.

C.J. EPSTEIN WORKS AS A CHIROPRACTIC INTERN AT THE ROBERT E. BUSH NAVAL HOSPITAL AND RECENTLY FINISHED HIS FINAL NATIONAL BOARD EXAM TO BECOME A DOCTOR AT THE AGE OF 24.

Interviewed and photographed by Cpl. Lauren Kurkimalis Dec. 11, 2013



[Top, right] Marines, sailors and spouses from the Combat Center, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar joined Professional Golfers' Association West club members for dinner at the PGA West clubhouse in La Quinta, Calif., Dec. 14. **[Top, left]** Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Warren, sergeant major, Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity, individually recognizes every service member in attendance at the Toys for Tots dinner at the clubhouse in La Quinta, Calif., Dec. 14. **[Bottom, left]** The dinner is an annual event in which club members invite service members over for a free dinner and a low-cost, weekend stay at their resort in support of the Toys for Tots program.



TOYS FOR TOTS

Story and photos by LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

Service members meet for charity dinner

Marines, sailors and spouses from the Combat Center, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton and Marine Corps Air Station Miramar joined Professional Golfers' Association West club members for dinner at the PGA West clubhouse in La Quinta, Calif., Saturday.

The dinner is an annual event in which the PGA West club members invite service members over for a free dinner and a low-cost, weekend-stay at their resort in honor of the Toys for Tots program.

The Toys for Tots program is designed to help less fortunate children throughout the country experience the joy of Christmas. The program accepts toy donations for up to three months out of the year to be distributed to those who need them during the Christmas season.

To begin the evening, service members and their spouses arrived with gifts to donate for the program and then made their way throughout the dining hall introducing themselves and preparing for the night's dinner and entertainment.

"I don't think the club members will ever truly know how

much we appreciate being invited to events like these," said Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Warren, sergeant major, Marine Corps Tactical Systems Support Activity. "We don't do what we do for accolades or to be recognized. We do it because we love America. Events like these though, when we are recognized, make us feel on top of the world."

The annual event is greatly looked forward to by both Marines and club members as they have the opportunity to show appreciation for one another, according to Todd Keefer, general manager, PGA West.

"Many of our members have served in some form of the military, and we are very much appreciative of all those currently serving," Keefer said. "This is our way of giving back to our military and also the community through the Toys for Tots program."

For the evening's entertainment, the Palm Desert High School Chamber Singers voiced their best Christmas songs in light of the holiday season.

Anyone interested in donating to the Toys for Tots program can visit their website at www.toysfortots.org.



Hey Combat Center fans – Spread the word! The Combat Center has its own Flickr photo and video streams. Find them at <http://www.flickr.com/thecombatcenter>.



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CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

MATH	HADON	ASPS			
ALOU	OPERA	THEO			
TANGERINES	TRAY				
EIGHTDAYS	A WEEK				
	TEN	INV			
DOGMAS	FIELDERS				
ACRE	ULNAE	POI			
WHENIMSIXTYFOUR					
NRA	GASES	URGE			
SETTLERS	EARTH	S			
	SAO	ADM			
OCTOPUSSGARDEN					
TROT	STAYATHOME				
VETO	SAVOR	ELMO			
SOTO	THEUS	ALAN			

SUDOKU SOLUTIONS

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FUTURE OF THE CORPS

MCJROTC CADETS VISIT COMBAT CENTER

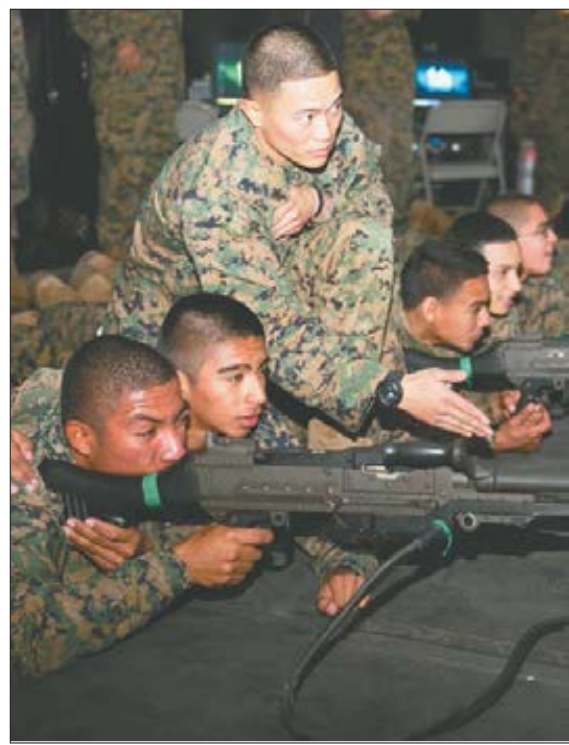


Story and photos by LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

Did you know: While visiting the Combat Center, Desert Hot Springs High students were given the opportunity to learn marksmanship skills at the Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainer.

[Left] Sgt. Kyle Stewart, machine gunner, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, explains the firing procedures for a M2 .50 Caliber machine gun to Marine Corps Junior Reserves Officers Training Corps cadets at the Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Training Center Wednesday.

[Bottom Left] Sgt. Derick Organo, machine gunner, 3/4, explains the firing procedures for the M2 .50 Caliber machine gun to MCJROTC cadets at the ISMT Wednesday.



Approximately 40 Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps cadets from Desert Hot Springs High School in Palm Springs, Calif., visited the Combat Center to gain additional knowledge in military training Wednesday.

The purpose of the program is to instill in students the values of citizenship, service to the United States, personal responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment.

During their visit to the Combat Center, the cadets were given a period of instruction on different weapon systems and the opportunity to apply marksmanship skills at the Indoor Simulated Marksmanship Trainer.

After firing, the cadets ate at

Phelps Mess Hall and then went to the Combat Center's Marine Corps Exchange, furthering their opportunity to experience how Marines live on a daily basis.

"We appreciate the opportunity to be able to come out here and see more into how the Marines do things on a day-to-day basis," said Alexander Camacho, cadet, MCJROTC, Desert Hot Springs High School. "The cadets getting this training get a boost in choosing their future career paths. I personally want to become a pilot, and am deciding between the Marine Corps and the Army. Experiences like this greatly help in making that decision."

With the MCJROTC being a school program, it was difficult for them to get a lot of hands-on weapons training, according to Carl Lewke, senior Marine instructor,

MCJROTC program.

"Marksmanship training is an important aspect of our program," Lewke said. "For the cadets who plan on joining the service, they are going to need to learn the fundamentals. It is a great thing for us to be invited to the Combat Center to allow the cadets a chance to get that training."

While it was good training for the cadets, it was also a great experience for the Marines instructing them, according to Capt. Benjamin Rapach, combat engineer officer, Headquarters Battalion.

"It was great to have the chance to work with them and see them go through the ISMT training," Rapach said. "These kids are potentially the future of our military."

COMBAT CENTER

supports

HEALTHY BASE INITIATIVE

Operation Live Well, a year-long program supporting the healthy-base initiative, encourages Combat Center patrons to practice healthy lifestyles, which battle obesity and tobacco use. These behaviors include physical fitness, mental fitness and healthy eating habits.



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. CHARLES SANTAMARIA

STORY WRITTEN BY
LANCE CPL. ALEJANDRO BEDOYA

+Many Marines and sailors are issued meal cards and depend on the chow halls for their primary means of food. Department of Defense mess facilities have changed their menus to meet the nutritional needs of those meal card holders and give them healthier options.

"We changed our chow halls to be more like a food



court," said June Richardson, area operations manager, Sodexo government services. "We wanted the service members to be able to come in and be able to have multiple options instead of just having two lines to choose from."

There are separate lines in each chow hall to meet the needs of each customer. Each line serves different types of food including rice, fruit, steamed vegetables and soups. The chow halls also contain salad bars where patrons may create their own salad with various toppings and dressings. The food service Marines will respond to any feedback provided by people eating at the mess hall.

"We have multiple ways of receiving feedback," said Bill Gearhart, technical representative. "People can go online to submit an interactive customer evaluation or fill out a comment card in the chow halls."

The interactive customer evaluations may be submitted by going to the Combat Center's food service web page. The link is located at the bottom of the page.

Comment cards may also be used by going to the mess hall and filling one out. A response to both of these surveys is usually given within 24 hours.

"We want good and bad feedback," Gearhart said. "We want to be able to respond to what people have to say and make our chow halls the best they can possibly be."

The Marine Corps is well-known for striving to be the best. The Corps' standards force Marines to be mentally and physically fit. Marines are strongly encouraged to have healthy eating habits to assist in meeting those standards.

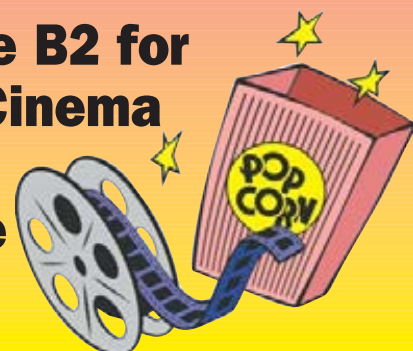
"We have to eat healthy to avoid injury," said Cpl. Daniel Logan, infantryman, 1st Tank Battalion. "The first step of eating healthy is having those options."

Combat Center mess halls provide healthy options to Marines for breakfast, lunch and dinner.



Visit the official Marine Corps Air Ground
Combat Center facebook page at
<http://www.facebook.com/thecombatcenter>

See page B2 for
Sunset Cinema
movie
schedule





LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

Marines with 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Reigment, lift a mattress found in the desert onto a dump truck during a community clean-up effort in Wonder Valley, Calif. Dec 14.

CLEAN UP, from A1

Marine Regiment. "As Marines, we are used to cleaning up after ourselves, and since this is our home for the time being, it is a great chance for us to come out here and do what Marines do: help out the community."

Throughout the day, Marines and community members picked up more than 20 truckloads of debris, and were able to return home knowing they did their part in giving back to the community.

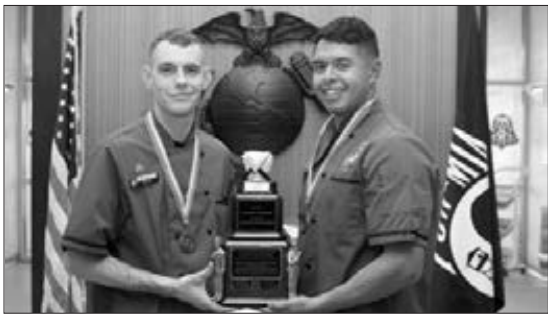
CHEF, from A1

cooking styles. After the test, the chefs competed in a jeopardy-style competition, which also tested them on basic culinary information. The top three teams earned a chance to compete in a cooking portion that was timed and monitored.

"We had four hours to cook our dishes," said Lance Cpl. Ernesto Hernandez, blue team. "Everything seemed so fast. People were running around like crazy to try and get their plates done."

All chefs were given the same ingredients to choose from and were instructed to make an appetizer, entrée and dessert. The dishes were judged on multiple factors including taste, presentation and an explanation of how it was prepared and how the ingredients were utilized.

"It was tough, but nice to have freedom and be able to cook what you want and how you want,"



LANCE CPL ALEJANDRO BEDOYA

Cpl. Eric Dibble and Lance Cpl. Ernesto Hernandez, winners of the competition, hold their trophy at Phelps Mess Hall Dec. 18.

said Cpl. Eric Dibble, blue team. "This competition gives us a chance to get away from being restricted to a menu and I am proud to say we came out on top."

The winners of the Chef of the Quarter Competition were Cpl. Eric Dibble and Lance Cpl. Ernesto Hernandez.

"This competition is good for all of Marine Corps food services," Dibble said. "We are not just combat cooks that mass-cook everything. We are good at what we do and we prove it in these competitions."

SWIM, from A1

will grab the water and push themselves off of it.

It has very minimal splash, it's like hot-knifing butter."

Placed at the head of the lane are three pairs of goggles, two water bottles, one pair of flip-flops, a wrist-watch, and a sheet of paper with the word "relax" written in permanent marker.

The waves Tolbert creates ripple into the neighboring lanes, but they are empty. He beat other swimmers and even the morning sunrise in his testament of aquatic will.

"I look at [swimming] as fitness for life," Tolbert said. "There are a lot of benefits to the body by staying active. That manifests itself into the sports that I enjoy."

Three sounds fill the air: the small talk of present life-guards, a radio station boasting its selection of '80s music, and continuous movement of Tolbert in the water, which bears resemblance to auditory determination, if there ever was one.

"I like to challenge myself with distance," Tolbert said. "Last month was the 7.4 mile swim, the longest I had gone. This will break that record."

Tolbert keeps a constant

speed going. His face surfaces every few seconds for a quick breath, and his arms cycle overhead and into the water like a windmill. Minor splashes gently pound the pool. For his first time traversing this distance, wasting valuable energy is not in the cards.

Half an hour into the nearly 13,000-meter trek, the sun finally begins to rise. The Combat Center starts to wake up. Little changes in the swimming pool, as Tolbert keeps going and going. On a bench, Valdez keeps a clipboard and stopwatch to time each lap, at Tolbert's request.

"This is about technique and endurance," Valdez said. "He's constantly trying to improve."

Tolbert shows no signs of putting his swimming aspirations to rest. Rather, it joins his passion for exercise alongside running and cycling.

"Now, I'd like to get base involvement on long-distance swim events, such as the birthday one we did last month," Tolbert said.

A call to all swimmers up to the challenge, no doubt.

Relax with the paper

Wednesdays and Saturdays with the Hi-Desert Star
 Thursdays with The Desert Trail
 Fridays with The Observation Post

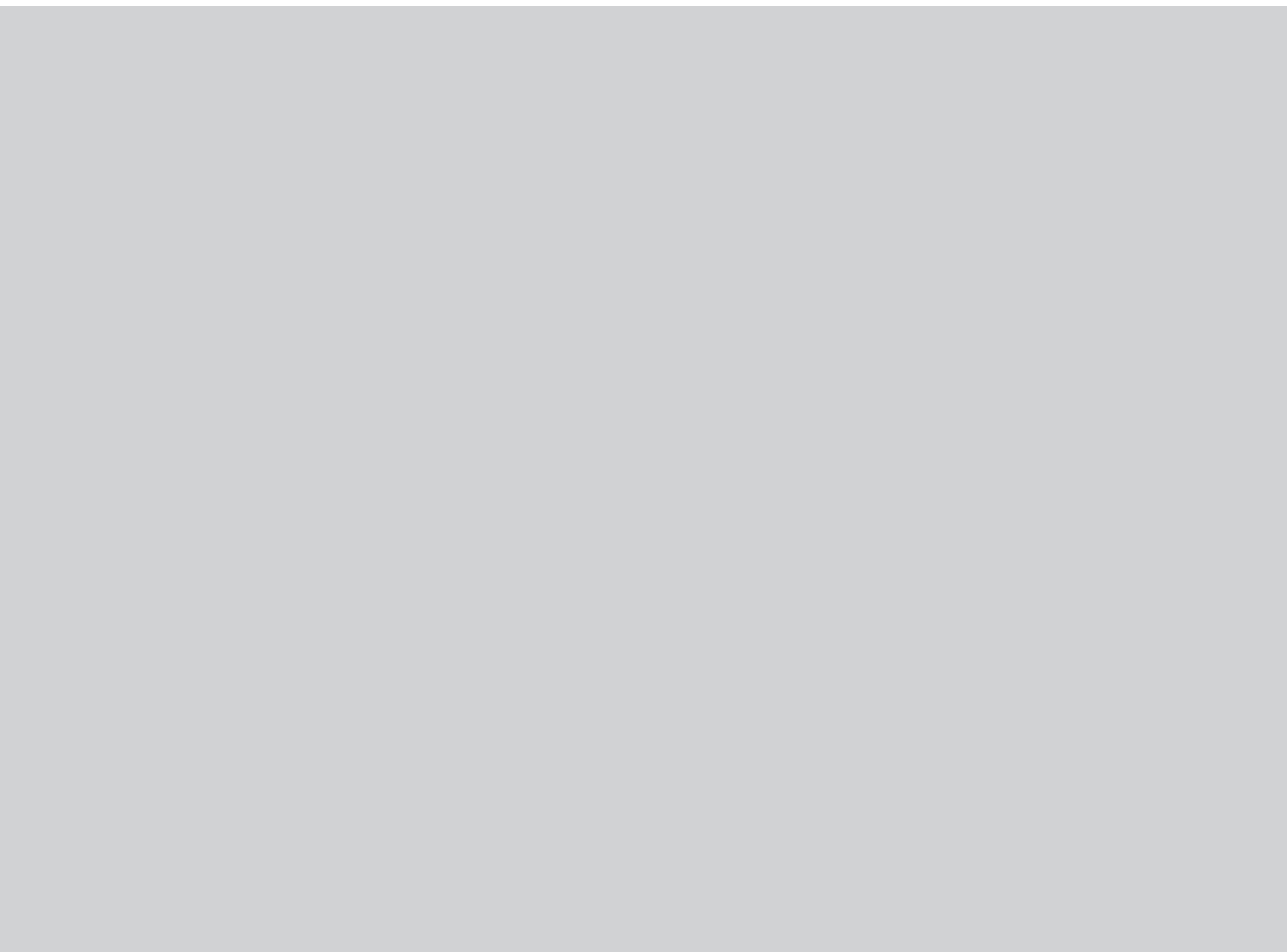
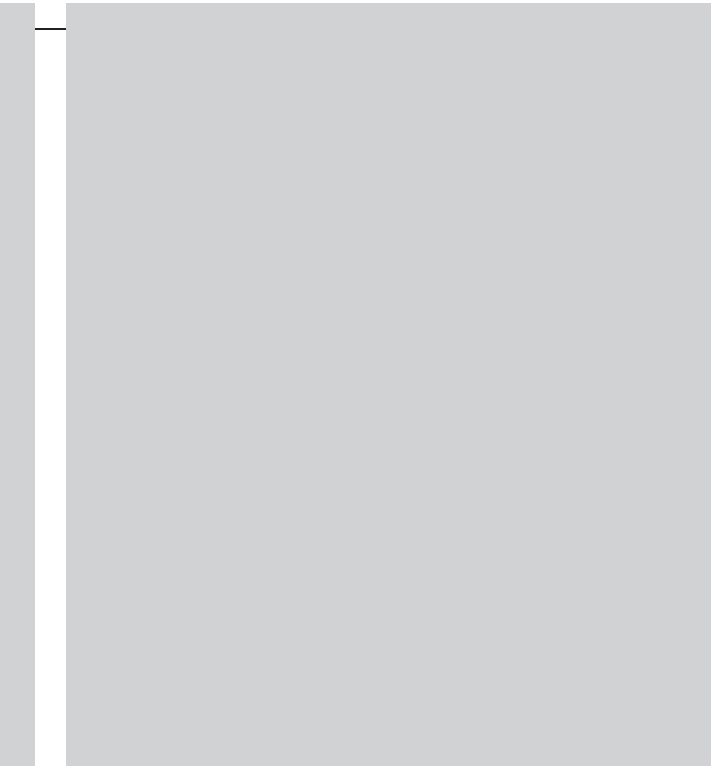
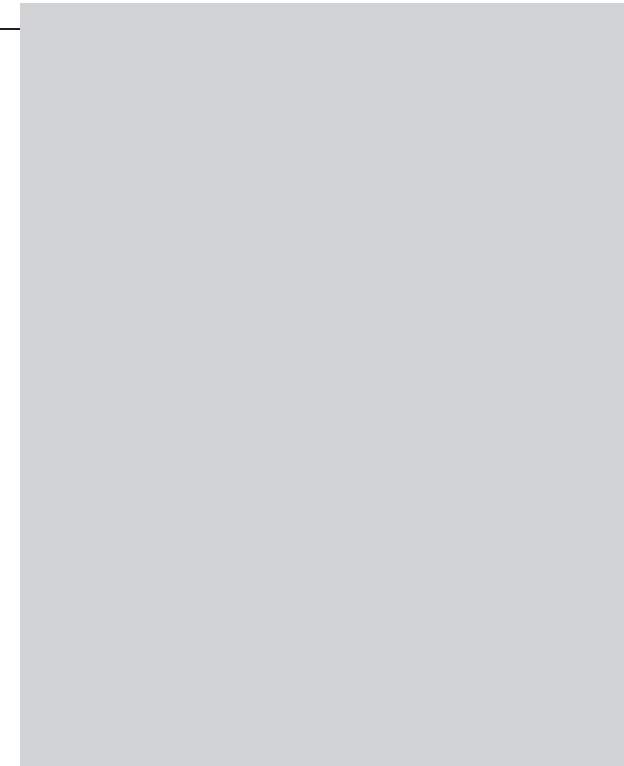
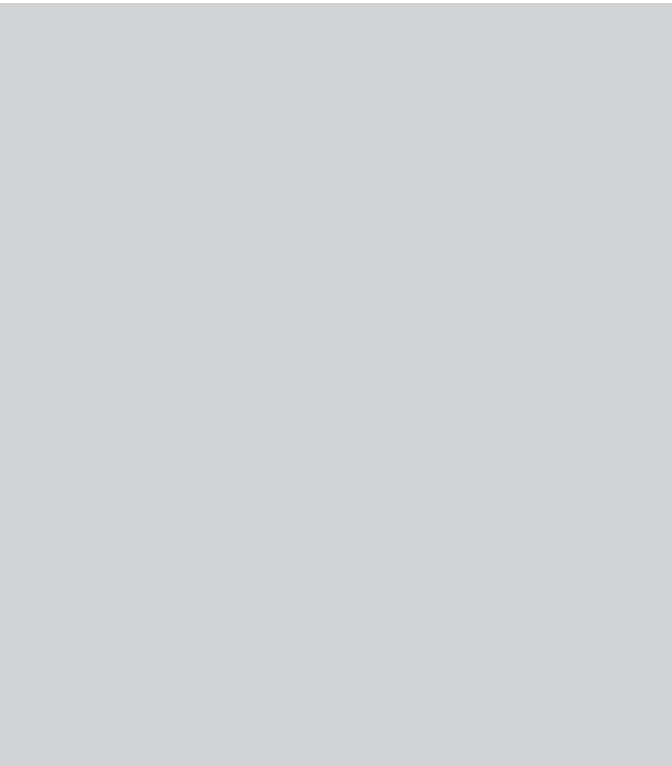
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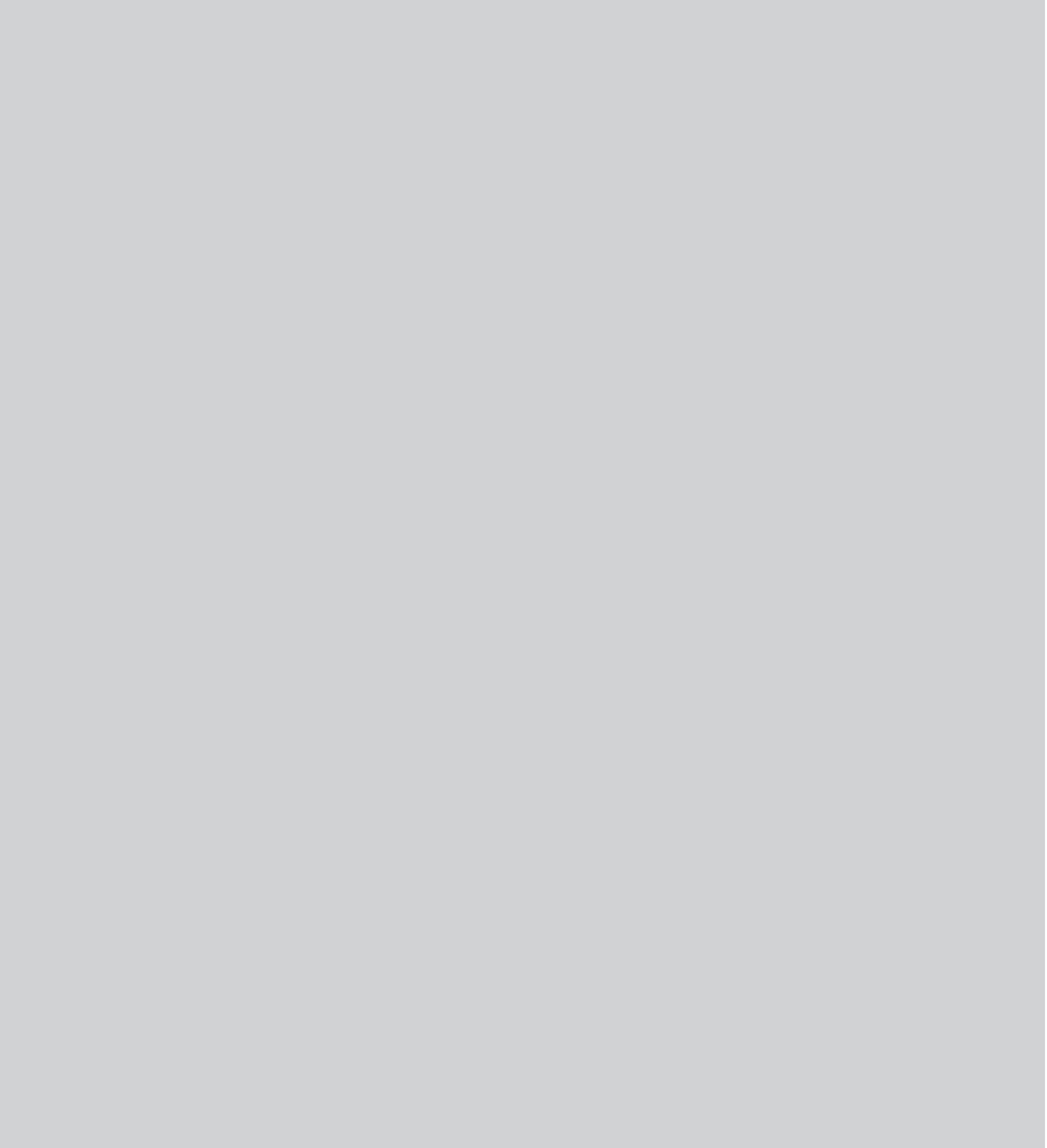
WeekINPhotos

3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. SEAN SEARFUS

[Above] Lance Cpl. Duane Bierman, machine gunner, Company L, 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, provides security during a convoy outside Forward Operating Base Zeebrugge, Kajaki district, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, Dec. 1. The convoy was conducted to transport items to a landing zone.
[Above, left] Marines with L Co., 3/7, conduct a casualty-evacuation drill on FOB Zeebrugge, Kajaki District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan, Dec. 1.
[Bottom, left] Marines with L Co., 3/7, conduct a casualty-evacuation drill on Forward Operating Base Zeebrugge, Kajaki District, Helmand Province, Afghanistan Dec. 1. The drill was conducted to maintain readiness in the event of a casualty situation.





WOOD HOBBY SHOP

offers place to create

The sound of saws, drills, and other machines vibrate through the metal walls as new creations begin to take form. The smell of freshly-cut wood permeates through the rooms as feet leave their impressions in the sawdust on the floor. Stacked on the shelves is a variety of wood; Cherry, Oak, Pine and Mahogany, all the raw start of wood-working projects to come.



Story and Photos by
LANCE CPL. CHARLES J. SANTAMARIA

The Combat Center's Wood Hobby Shop can be known as a well-kept secret. It provides a place for Marines, sailors and family members, above the age of 16, interested in wood working to make awards, furniture, art and personal projects. The shop is open Wednesday through Sunday and offers several saws, drills, sanders and a laser engraver.

"Our shop is all encompassing," said Don Miller, shop manager, Wood Hobby Shop. "We offer many things to our customers and give them the tools needed to help them make their projects and ideas become reality."

The shop offers a variety of tools to use, which gives people more options and possibilities for the things they can create, said Sgt. David Dominguez, combat engineer, Combat Logistics Battalion 7.

The shop also offers an environment for Combat Center patrons to focus on something other than work and stressful situations they may have, and create something for themselves.

"It gives Marines a creative outlet," Miller said. "Wood-working gives them an opportunity to occupy their time instead of staying in the barracks."

For Miller, wood-working became a hobby while in the Wounded Warrior Project and for him, lent a sense of pride with each project.

"The process of making something and getting it to perfection is therapeutic. It helped with my healing process and gave me something to occupy my time," Miller said. "It starts from a piece of

wood and turns into your own creation. When anyone asks you where you got it from, you can say, 'I made that.'"

Service members take pride in what they do when they use the facility. For some, the shop helps wood-working become a whole new hobby in their life.

"I have never done something like a computer desk before," Dominguez said. "I'm a combat engineer, so it's my job to build things, but making creative projects that I can take pride in and make unique is satisfying."

The different ideas and methods of using the different equipment in the shop from the people that used them created a melting pot of creative thinking.

"People bring creativity and feed off each other's ideas which bring a lot of energy into the shop," Miller said. "Seeing all the different creations that come from people seeing projects happening around them and wanting to make those same projects in a different way becomes an exciting thing to see."

The shop has seen projects from plaques and awards for a unit, to surf boards and canoes. The laser engraver the shop received now allows people to cut more precise and engrave images on wood, plastic, and even electronics like laptops with the exception of metal. Given the amount of resources available in the shop, the amount of possible things one can create are endless.

"We leave the people to be limited only by their imagination," Miller said. "We want to let people truly create anything and its just fun."

Anyone interested in using the workshop must attend a one-hour safety class held on Wednesday nights and Saturday mornings. For more information on the shop or how to participate, call the Wood Hobby Shop office at 760-830-7214.

"The process of making something and getting it to perfection is therapeutic. It helped with my healing process and gave me something to occupy my time."

-Don Miller



[Top] Sgt. David Dominguez, combat engineer, Combat Logistics Battalion 7, builds a computer desk at the Combat Center's Wood Hobby Shop Dec. 8.

[Center] Jenny Cronin, spouse of 1st Lt. Justin Cronin, executive officer, Company D, 1st Tank Battalion, edges the corners on a cutting board at the Combat Center's Wood Hobby Shop Dec. 8.

[Above] A wooden plaque with an artist's rendition of the Twentynine Palms desert area hangs on the wall of the Combat Center's Wood Hobby Shop Dec. 8.



Combat Center Events

Latin Night

A night of dancing, drinks, food, and fun. The dance will be open to NCOs and above.
 When: 5 p.m. - 9 p.m., Friday, Dec. 20
 Where: Hashmarks, SNCO Club
 For more information call 830-5035

Military Spouses night out

Free Dinner and transportation will be provided to Palm Springs Follies. Registration ends Dec. 27.
 When: 2:30 p.m. - 9 p.m., Wednesday, Jan. 8
 Where: Palm Springs Follies
 For more information contact Judy Moore at 830-5054

Youth Basketball Registration

The youth basketball season runs January - March and is open to children ages 4 - 14.
 When: Now - Jan. 1
 Where: Community Center, Building 1004
 For more information call 830-8421

Whooping Cough Vaccines available

This is a one-time booster for individuals over the age of seven. The boosters are available in the immunization clinic for children and adults on a walk-in basis.
 When: 9 - 11:30 a.m. and 1 - 4 p.m., Mon. - Fri.
 Where: Robert E. Bush Naval Hospital
 For more events visit <http://www.mccs29palms.com>

Sunset Cinema

Friday, Dec. 20

4 p.m. - Free Admission Home Alone , PG
 6:30 p.m. - Free Birds, PG
 9 p.m. - Thor: The Dark World 3-D, PG-13
 12 a.m. - Delivery Man, PG-13

Saturday, Dec. 21

10:00 a.m. - Free Admission Home Alone 2, PG
 1 p.m. - Ender's Game, PG-13
 4 p.m. - Free Birds 3-D, PG
 6:30 p.m. - Delivery Man, PG-13
 9 p.m. - Thor: The Dark World 3-D, PG-13
 11:30 p.m. - Last Vegas, PG-13

Sunday, Dec. 22

12:30 p.m. - Free Admission Elf, PG
 3 p.m. - The Best Man Holiday, R
 6 p.m. - The Hunger Games: Catching Fire, PG-13
 9 p.m. - Dallas Buyers Club, R

Monday, Dec. 23

3 p.m. - Free Admission Polar Express, G
 5 p.m. - Free Admission The Grinch, PG
 7:30 p.m. - Thor: The Dark World 3-D, PG-13

Tuesday, Dec. 24

3 p.m. - Free Admission Arthur Christmas, PG-13
 5 p.m. - Free Admission The Night Before Christmas, PG
 7 p.m. - Free Birds 3-D, PG

Wednesday, Dec. 25

6 p.m. - The Hunger Games: Catching Fire, PG-13

Thursday, Dec. 26

3 p.m. - Free Birds, PG
 5:30 p.m. - Ender's Game, PG-13
 8 p.m. - About Time, R

High Desert

Free Line-Dance Lessons

Learn to dance the night away
 When: 5 - 9 p.m., every Sunday
 Where: Willie Boy's Saloon and Dance Hall
 50048 29 Palms Hwy, Morongo Valley, Calif.
 For more information, call (760) 363-3343.

The importance of being earnest

A trivial comedy for serious people
 When: 7 p.m., Fridays & Saturdays, Jan. 10 - Feb. 8
 Where: Theatre 29
 73637 Sullivan Rd., Twentynine Palms, Calif.
 For more information, call (760) 316-4151

Low Desert

Moscow Battlet

A performance of the Nutcracker
 When: 8 p.m., Friday, Dec. 20
 Where: Agua Caliente Casino, Resort and Spa
 32-250 Bob Hope Dr., Rancho Mirage, Calif.
 For more information, call 888-999-1995 or visit <http://hotwatercasino.com>

Dazz Band

Grammy Award-winning funk band performs
 When: 10:30 p.m., Tuesday, Dec. 31
 Where: Morongo Casino Resort and Spa
 49500 Seminole Drive, Cabazon, Calif.
 For more information, call 800-252-4499 or visit <http://www.morongocasinoresort.com>

Kathleen Madigan

American Comdey Award winner performs
 When: 8 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 11
 Where: Spotlight 29 Casino
 46-200 Harrison Place, Coachella, Calif.
 For more information, call 866-377-6829 or visit <http://www.spotlight29.com>

Snoop Dogg aka Snoop Lion

Multi-platinum artist performs
 When: 8 p.m., Saturday, Jan. 11
 Where: Fantasy Springs Resort Casino
 84-245 Indio Springs Parkway, Indio, Calif.
 For more information, call 800-827-2946 or visit <http://www.fantasyspringsresort.com>

Disney princesses in 'Frozen' are too cool for storybook endings



COURTESY PHOTO

NEIL POND

"Frozen"

Starring the voices of Kristen Bell, Josh Gad, Jonathan Groff & Idina Menzel
 Directed by Chris Buck & Jennifer Lee
 PG, 108 minutes

Disney princesses are nothing new, but this movie is generous: It has not one, but two.

Loosely adapted from a 19th century Hans Christen Anderson folk epic, "Frozen" marks a return to the song-filled fairytale-fantasy format that became a Disney hallmark in "The Little Mermaid" (another Hans Christen Anderson fable) and "Beauty and the Beast."

Here, a pair of young royal daughters, Anna (Kristen Bell) and Elsa (Idina Menzel), grow up apart, sequestered from each other in their sprawling Nordic palace after an unfortunate childhood incident reveals the dangerous darker side of Elsa's mysterious "gift" to deep-freeze anything she touches.

When the girls become young women and Elsa is reluctantly crowned queen, her coronation ball ends in an unplanned eruption of her powers. Accidentally turning summer into winter and perma-frosting her entire kingdom, the "ice queen" flees to the top of a desolate snow-swept mountaintop.

Some of the townspeople think Elsa's a "monster." Her little-sis princess, insisting she's just misunderstood, sets off

to find her. Along the way, Anna meets a helpful ice harvester (Jonathan Groff, from TV's "Glee"), his trusty reindeer Sven, and a goofy, gabby snowman, Olaf (Josh Gad), who longs to experience the warmth of summer-without realizing what heat can do to his cool composure.

The songs woven into the storyline are almost all stand-outs, signaling a new batch of Disney musical cream rising to the top. They're from the husband and wife songwriting team of Bobby and Kristen Anderson-Lopez. Lopez has won Tony Awards for his Broadway work, and the tunes in "Frozen" likewise sound like they're just waiting to be launched into a lavish, long-running stage production.

The story sags a bit in places but comes through with plenty of humor, heart and a couple of rousing action scenes, including a thrilling chase by snarling wolves through a pre-dawn forest and an encounter with a fearsome snow monster. The computer-generated animation is impressive, with many dazzling cinematic variations on the "beautiful, powerful, dangerous, cold" ice themes noted in the opening musical number.

And in the end, we're left with a message that won't surprise anyone who's ever seen any Disney movie-but one that, refreshingly, doesn't quite conform to a "typical" princess-storybook ending, either. The two "Frozen" sisters may not exactly represent a new royal standard in Disney females, but they do pack a powerful two-fisted punch about the power of love ... and waiting for the right person who, as Olaf puts it, is "worth melting for."

Relax with the paper

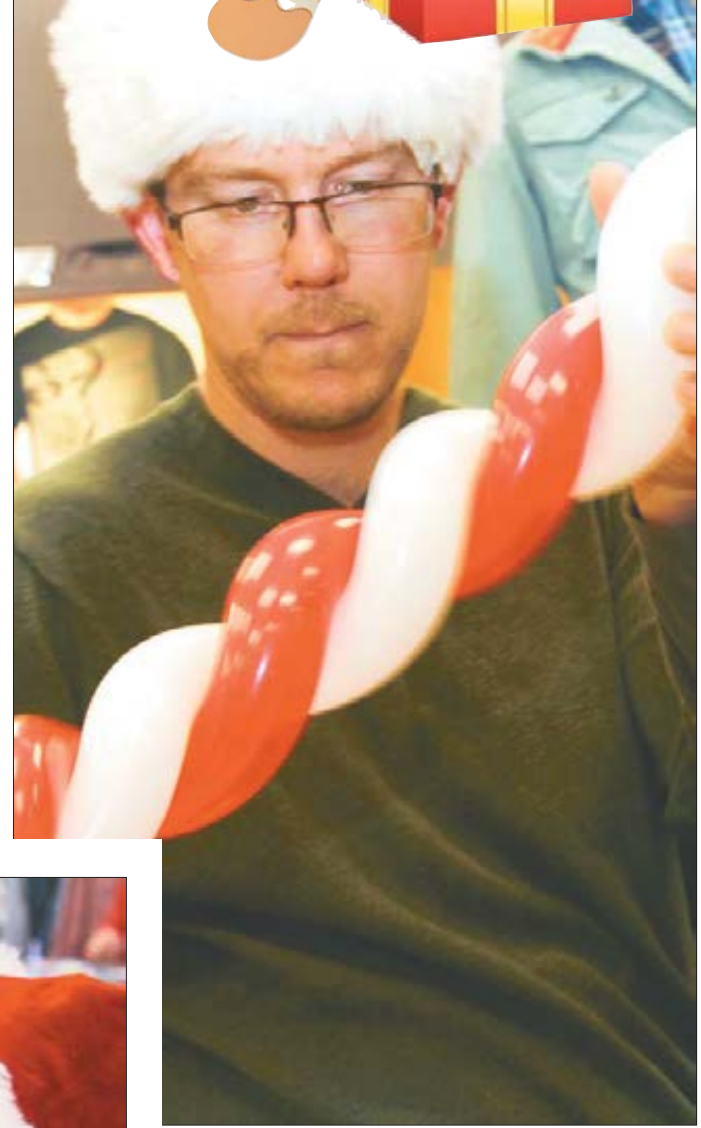
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FAMILY HOLIDAY EVENT



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. CHARLES J. SANTAMARIA

[Top, left] Stevyni Bundy, daughter of Lisa Bundy, head of firearms, Marine Corps Exchange, gets a holiday-themed symbol painted on her arm during the Family Holiday Event at the Combat Center's MCX Dec. 13.

[Above] Jason Lancaster, professional balloonist, Party Animals Company, makes a candy cane made of balloons to give to children during the Holiday Family Event at the Combat Center's Main Exchange Dec. 13.

[Left] Cameryn Gill, 3, daughter of Petty Officer 2nd Class James Gill, Navy Personnel, 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, eagerly waited for the balloonist to finish making their balloon gifts during the Holiday Family Event at the Combat Center's MCX Dec. 13.



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