

*Princess
of the
Castle*

3rd CEB fathers, daughters share special night

Story and photos by **LANCE CPL. CHARLES SANTAMARIA**

See **PRINCESS** page A6

Combat Center commissary goes green, recycles

Cpl. D. J. Wu

Combat Correspondent

The Combat Center commissary, alongside commissaries across the nation, are now making it easy for customers to recycle plastic bags.

Combat Center customers can now bring their used plastic bags to the commissary and place them recycling bins found inside the main entrance.

"Commissaries already recycle a lot of waste generated by store operations," said Jessica Rouse, public affairs specialist, Defense Commissary Agency. "In fiscal year 2013, the agency recycled more than 139 million pounds of cardboard, plastic and paper. The agency's goal is to

"In fiscal year 2013, the agency recycled more than 139 million pounds of card board, plastic and paper."

— Jessica Rouse

recycle 80 percent of all recyclable material generated in stores worldwide by the end of fiscal year 2014."

The Combat Center's commissary has their recycle bins located at the main entrance. The facility is one of two stores testing dehydrators that reduce the weight of organic waste to produce compost.

The dehydrators take the moisture out of organic materials, such as discarded fruits and vegetables, to reduce weight and recycles the materials, creating compost.

"We are very active in our recycling program," said

See **RECYCLE** page A6



Sgt. Maj. Insu Paek, former Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School sergeant major, speaks to the attendees during a Relief and Appointment and Retirement Ceremony at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field, Tuesday.

MCCES SgtMaj retires after 30 years

Cpl. D. J. Wu

Combat Correspondent

Friends and families gathered to say good bye to Sgt. Maj. Insu Paek as he retired after 30 years of honorable service during a Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School Relief and Appointment Ceremony and Retirement Ceremony at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field, Tuesday.

Paek relinquished the non-commissioned officer sword to Col. Andrew Murray, commanding officer, MCCES, symbolically handing over his responsibilities as senior enlisted advisor of the school to the new sergeant major of MCCES, Sgt. Maj. Robert Sites.

"I can't think of a better time and place to retire," Paek said. "It is truly humbling to have everyone come out for this ceremony. I want to thank everyone for being here, and especially the students of MCCES. Some have been here more than a year, some have been here a few days. I just want to say thanks."

Paek served in many capacities during his Marine Corps career. By trade, Paek started out as a motor transport operator. He deployed

to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. He later served as a recruiter in Southern California, where he was meritoriously promoted to staff sergeant.

Throughout Paek's career, he has been an example for Marines and setting the bar of what they should aspire to be.

"Sgt. Maj. Paek has given his entire adult life to the United States Marine Corps and to our country," Murray said. "He's gone everywhere and done everything the Marine Corps has asked him to do without complaint and concern."

Sites is returning to the Combat Center after serving as sergeant major of Recruiting Station Portland, Ore. Sites last served at the Combat Center with Headquarters Battalion. He expressed excitement to return to Twentynine Palms and is ready to get to work at MCCES.

"When I told my wife we were moving back to (Twentynine Palms), she was in tears, tears... of joy," Sites said. "This is our third time here in (Twentynine Palms) and we couldn't be happier to be around Marines again."



Sgt. Maj. Insu Paek, former MCCES Sergeant Major, walks past the flag pole on his way to his Relief and Appointment at Lance Cpl. Torrey L. Gray Field, Tuesday.



The Mobile Detection Assessment Response System surveys the area around the Combat Center's Expeditionary Airfield, Feb. 6. The MDARS can be equipped with weapon systems and can be adapted to the needs of the Air Base Ground Defense.

SPAWAR system provides security for Marines

Cpl. D. J. Wu

Combat Correspondent

Marines with Marine Wing Support Squadron 374 conducted Air Base Ground Defense training during their evolution of the Integrated Training Exercise with the help of a new unmanned ground device, the Mobile Detection Assessment Response System, Feb. 6.

The MDARS, developed by the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command, or SPAWAR, lends support for the ABGD

with either user-operated or autonomous controls. It patrols its environment and constantly surveys the area for possible threats.

Though the SPAWAR team only spent a few days at the Combat Center during the ITX, they were able to demonstrate the MDARS' capabilities for the Marine Aircraft Group 13 and MWSS-374 Marines.

"The system works really well in notifying my Marines if activity is detected," said 1st Lt. Erin Mahonney, platoon commander, MWSS-374. "We had an

See **SECURITY** page A6

100 companies to hire 100,000 veterans by 2015

Cheryl Pellerin
Headquarters Marine Corps

WASHINGTON D.C. — First lady Michelle Obama announced Feb. 10 that more than 100 construction industry companies have committed to hiring more than 100,000 military veterans over the next five years.

Michelle and Labor Secretary Thomas E. Perez delivered remarks at the National Symposium on Veterans' Employment in Construction, hosted at the Labor Department.

The event brought together construction industry officials, government leaders and education professionals to highlight hiring commitments throughout the industry, and addressed employment challenges and opportunities for transitioning service members and veterans.

Michelle called the commitment to veterans "a huge deal." She added, "It's days like today that remind me why Dr. (Jill) Biden and I started (Joining Forces) in the first place."

Joining Forces is a national initiative championed by the first lady and the vice president's wife to engage all sectors of society to give service members and their family members opportunities and support.

"We did this because we wanted to inspire businesses and organizations across the country to ask themselves one simple ques-

tion: what more can we do to honor and support our veterans and military families?" Michelle said.

"Today, all of you answered that question with this incredibly strong commitment," Michelle said. "I know that you all have made this commitment not just because it is the patriotic thing to do, (but also) because you know that America's military turns out some of the highest-skilled, hardest-working employees this country has ever seen."

The kind of work men and women in uniform do every day includes building cities in the middle of deserts halfway around the world, building schools in remote villages, and repairing complex machinery in combat zones in the middle of the night, Michelle added.

"Our troops have taken on some of the most challenging projects in some of the most inhospitable places under some of the toughest deadlines and constraints," Michelle said. "So when it comes to the attitude and the experience needed to thrive in construction jobs, our men and women in uniform are second to none."

As part of Joining Forces, the first lady and Dr. Biden issued a call to 50 U.S. governors to take executive or legislative action to streamline state licensing for service members, vet-

When it comes to the attitude and the experience needed to thrive in construction jobs, our men and women in uniform are second to none."

— Michelle Obama

See **VETERANS** page A6



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. CHARLES SANTAMARIA



Condor Elementary hosts Science Night

Lance Cpl. Charles Santamaria
 Combat Correspondent

For the last three years, Condor Elementary School has invited families from the community to participate in the school's Science Night. Signs directed families to the different sections of the school where exploding milk, conductors of electricity, a solid that can transform into a liquid and more than 100 other projects were presented for families and students.

Condor Elementary hosted its 3rd annual Science Night Feb. 5 in the main building of the school. Members of the staff and teachers set up stations for hands-on experiments in classrooms near the entrance while students lined their projects in the hallways for all to see.

"We have always had science fairs at Condor," said Tabitha Harrington, Science Night coordinator, Condor Elementary School. "We wanted to make it something not only for our school, but for all families to come participate. Holding this event not only helps the students learn but gets the parents involved in the process as well."

The Science Night also included a competition, which includ-

ed a board of judges who reviewed the best science projects. "Our board consists of an archaeologist from the community, a former principal, and other teachers from the school," Harrington said. "It's nice to see students compete and have something to work toward."

The best projects advanced to a competition between the local schools. The projects that qualify from each grade between the local schools can then move on to the county-wide science fair to compete against students from the region.

"It's great to see the students participate in events like this," said Karla Buchanan, Science Night coordinator, Condor Elementary School. "Seeing students from my class be successful and proud of the science projects they worked on makes all of this worth-while."

The Condor Science Night is now in its third year and the coordinators and staff only hope that it continues. Schools in the Morongo Unified School District will choose the best projects from each grade level to move on to the county competition.

"We just hope that this Science Night gets bigger," Harrington said. "For the last three years, we've seen so much more participation that we hope more families from all over come to see all the hard work our students have done."

[Above] Kadence Hernandez, 8, daughter of Master Gunnery Sgt. Carlos Hernandez, operations chief, Marine Corps Communication-Electronics School, explains her science project and the results of mummifying a hotdog during Condor Elementary's Science Night, Feb. 5.

[Top, left] Serina Zuniga, kindergarden teacher, Condor Elementary School, leads the Obleck Station during Condor Elementary's Science Night, Feb. 5.

[Top, right] Joseph Barbagallo Jr., 10, son of Gunnery Sgt. Joseph Barbagallo, maintenance chief, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, experiment in the Obleck Station during Condor Elementary's Science Night Feb. 5.



BIRTH ANNOUNCEMENTS



ADALYNN RAE HERNANDEZ
 Born on: Jan. 21, 2014
 Born to: Arturo and Adelaida Hernandez

GENESEEE MARIE CARTER
 Born on: Jan. 22, 2014
 Born to: Cameron and Kaleena Carter

ASHTON LARAWN HARRIS
 Born on: Jan. 23, 2014
 Born to: Ashton and Ashlyn Harris

GAVIN SCOTT PIERCE
 Born on: Jan. 28, 2014
 Born to: Traris and Sarah Pierce

PAIGE SUZZANNE ROBB
 Born on: Jan. 30, 2014
 Born to: Michael and Cassandra Robb

JAXON PAUL SNYDER
 Born on: Feb. 2, 2014
 Born to: Paul and Kylie Snyder

GREETINGS!

- Across**
- 1 Breaks into a computer system
 - 6 Go a few rounds in the ring
 - 10 Kind of carpet
 - 14 Shaquille once of the NBA
 - 15 ___ colada
 - 16 Show and ___
 - 17 Cute cat from Japan
 - 19 Utah ski resort
 - 20 Bird that hoots
 - 21 Fellow
 - 22 Took to the seas
 - 24 Chesapeake and Hudson
 - 25 Sleep loudly
 - 26 Capital of Greece
 - 29 Brunch beverage
 - 32 Tricky shoes to walk in
 - 33 Rice dish
 - 34 Soldiers, for short
 - 37 "Enchanted" girl in a 2004 film
 - 38 Sucker
 - 39 TV show set in Korea
 - 40 Brooks of "The Producers"
 - 41 Road payments
 - 42 "Common Sense" pamphleteer
 - 43 Non-alcoholic beer brand
 - 45 Makes a hard copy of
 - 46 Grand ___ National Park
 - 48 "High" time
 - 49 ___ groups
 - 51 Top medal in Sochi
 - 52 Charge
 - 55 Common surname in China
 - 56 Musical with an exclamation point
 - 59 Roll call answer
 - 60 Swedish superstore
 - 61 Clear, as a disk
 - 62 It can go downhill in a hurry
 - 63 ___ Station (New York City hub)
 - 64 Saw romantically
- Down**
- 1 "Very funny!"
 - 2 Once more
 - 3 ___ phone
 - 4 ___ Kan
 - 5 Mottoes
 - 6 Whirls
 - 7 Brad of Hollywood
 - 8 Picnic pest
 - 9 Beams
 - 10 New shirt ruins
 - 11 1987 Shelley Long comedy
 - 12 Make changes to
 - 13 Air freshener brand
 - 18 Lock openers
 - 23 Since
 - 24 Actor Lugosi
 - 26 "Pardon me..."
 - 27 Prefix with
 - 28 "Greetings!"
 - 29 Flour ___
 - 30 Societal problems
 - 31 April follower
 - 33 Survey before an election
 - 35 "That ___ funny!"
 - 36 The Beatles' "___ Leaving Home"
 - 38 Late singer Reed
 - 39 Common street name
 - 41 "Beloved" author Morrison
 - 42 Nudged along
 - 44 Put on, as a hat
 - 45 Game played on horseback
 - 46 Computer experts
 - 47 Lucy's best friend
 - 48 Pitcher Ryan
 - 50 Poker player's piece
 - 51 Hidden valley
 - 52 Like the Great Plains
 - 53 Otherwise
 - 54 Checked out
 - 57 Barely get, with "out"
 - 58 "...___ mouse"

See answers on page A6

SUDOKU 3174D

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

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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.

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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

Justin

Abilene, Texas Lieutenant, Combat Center Fire, 34

ROBINSON



> **I like anything** with competition. I like sports. I like working here with my firefighters and being active.

> **I was in the Marine Corps** from 1998 to 2006. I did two tours with 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion and a year and a half with 1st Marine Division as the commanding general's personal bodyguard.

> **I've been with the fight club** for a year and a half now. It's nice being on a team again. Camaraderie is great up there. We have a good coach and fighting platform. Working with Fight Club 29 has been a highlight the past couple of years.

> **The thing I like** about fighting is that it is just you. It's a competition with you and your opponent. How much work you put into it determines how much you get out of it. If you don't want to put in the work, it's going to show in the ring. Whether it's boxing, mixed martial arts or Pankration, your effort will show when you're fighting.

> **I'm a striker.** I like Pankration and limited MMA but my favorite is boxing followed by full-fledged MMA in the cage.

> **I started boxing** when I was 30 in Battle of the Badges, which is cops versus firefighters.

> **I never did any of this stuff** growing up. I grew up in Texas, so I played football.

> **I guess you can call** me getting into fighting a mid-life crisis. I was looking to be on a team. I couldn't do softball because of scheduling issues. Then, someone here, at the firehouse, challenged me to a "Tough Man" contest. I did it and I won. I've been hooked ever since.

> **It's really the team** and the competition. In the Marine Corps, you have the same thing. You are part of a unit. There is always competition within your unit and you have

that team aspect. When you go into combat, Marines are always by your side.

> **You work with them** and then you go into the fight with them. It's the same thing when you're in the ring. You train with them and you fight with them. When they're beat up, you're beat up.

> **The biggest thing I've learned** in fighting is that you have to stay calm in all situations. You can't react with emotion. What'll happen is you'll get angry and you won't be able to use the skills you learned.

> **The fondest moment I have** with the fight club was at a grappling tournament. I lost my first match and won my second. Coach then put me in the intermediate class which is way above my level. I won match after match, for a total of seven matches in one day. I ended up taking second place in that tournament.

> **The fight starts three** or four hours before the match with massive anxiety. You sit there for hours just waiting. There's nothing but anxiety, stress and pressure. They call your name a few minutes before and as you walk down the aisle, it just builds more. As soon as you get into the ring or the cage, you're done with the anxiety.

> **They ring the bell** and it's just you and him. You forget the lights, cheering and yelling, and you go to work. Once you're in there, it's great. It's the hours prior that will kill you.

> **My biggest thing in fighting** and practice is I talk to myself. I tell myself, "Keep your hands up and keep moving. Hands up. Move. Strike."

> **I've been with Combat Center** Fire for seven years. I basically transitioned out of the Marine Corps right into this.

> **The Marine Corps** gives you that team aspect the same way it does in the fire department. We have crews within fire companies just like you have squads in a platoon. We work and train together. We eat, sleep and when the bells ring, we go off to fires together.

> **Since the majority** of our area is concrete buildings, we don't get a whole lot of fires on base.

> **We do quite a bit** out in town. I wouldn't say a lot but I've fought my fair share of fires.

> **The closest thing I can relate** fighting a fire to is a fire fight while deployed. You get excited and nervous at the same time. It's one of those jobs where you want to go do it. If we have to do our jobs, someone is having a bad day.

> **You want to do your job**, but at the same time, you hope it doesn't occur. But once the bells go off and there's a fire, everyone is amped up and nervous but they're ready to go.

> **The anxiety is there** like with fighting, but going to a fire, I always have my team with me.

> **I talk to myself during a fire**, just like when I'm fighting. I always do a mental checklist and prepare for what could be ahead during that fire. It's a variation for each one, but you're still hitting those check marks.

> **Around the fire house** with my crew is like a comedy show all the time. If you don't have thick skin around here, you aren't going to make it. If you make any misstep, they'll be all over you.

> **But when the time comes**, we all stick together and act as a crew. It's a family atmosphere around here. For the most part, during the day, it's all professional. We take care of the engines and gear, and we train.

Interviewed and photographed by Cpl. D. J. Wu Feb. 5, 2014



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Flickr photo and video streams.
Find them at

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Did you know?

The Liberty Call page on B2 now has Combat Center club information

Excursions Enlisted Club
Bloodstripes NCO Club
Hashmarks 29 SNCO Club
Combat Center's Officers' Club



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

Faces in the Crowd

Photos by **CPL. ALI AZIMI**



1



2



3



4

[1] Marines with Combat Logistics Company 13 practice their rifle buttstock smash at the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program training area Wednesday. During MCMAP, Marines learn how to use their rifles as striking weapons to better prepare them for hand-to-hand situations.
 [2] Lance Cpl. Daniel Troupe, air maintenance mechanic, Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3, works on his pull-ups at the West Gym and Fitness Center Wednesday. Marines are expected to be able to conduct 20 dead-hang pull-ups for maximum points in their annual Physical Fitness Test.
 [3] Marines with CLC 13 practice their rifle-bayonet slash at the MCMAP training area Wednesday. The MCMAP training area provides a pit, bags and space to safely practice techniques.
 [4] Lance Cpl. Brian Thompson, motor vehicle transport operator, 1st Tank Battalion, plays basketball at the West Gym and Fitness Center Wednesday. Thompson plays basketball everyday to help maintain his cardio.



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SUDOKU SOLUTIONS

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CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS

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See page B2 for Sunset Cinema movie schedule



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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King of the Hammers



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL. KASEY PEACOCK

[Above] The Combat Center's color guard stands at attention moments before racers take their marks during the final race of the 2014 King of the Hammers event in Johnson Valley, Calif., Feb. 7. **[Top, left]** Various Ultra 4 vehicle drivers make their way to the starting line for the last race of the 2014 King of the Hammers event in Johnson Valley, Calif., Feb. 7. **[Left]** Participants take off from the starting line during the last race of the 2014 King of the Hammers event in Johnson Valley, Calif., Feb. 7. The event lasted one week.



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PRINCESS, from A1

Music played as Marines danced with their daughters during the 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion's Princess of the Castle event Feb. 7, at the Officers' Club.

The event featured tables, a full assortment of snack and entrees (for families to eat), and a dance floor for the fathers and daughters to dance the night away.

3rd CEB returned from deployment this year and, with this event, were able to spend a special moment with their daughters.

"It's our first time doing this as a unit on our own," said Erika Capistran, family readiness officer, 3rd CEB. "It was just a great opportunity to have the 'princesses of the castle' here with their fathers making memories that will last a lifetime."

Volunteers for the event, along with coordinators for the unit, made the event come together so the fathers of 3rd CEB could have a memorable night. The music varied from slow music for the fathers and daughters to fast dance music that led the daughters to jump for joy while their fathers watched.

"I really appreciate that the volunteers went out of their way to bring the Marines

and their families together when we have to spend so much time away from them," said Cpl. Derick Eapapcia, heavy equipment mechanic, Support Company, 3rd CEB. "The number one thing that I missed while I was in Afghanistan was my family and an event like this brings me closer to my daughter. It makes me feel grateful to the people that set this up and I'm speechless for that."

Volunteers for the unit also saw the importance of the event for the Marines and their families.

"It's a special time for them to spend a night with their fathers," said Amber Culp, volunteer, wife of Capt. Jeremiah Culp, executive officer, Co. B, 3rd CEB. "When a father is gone for so long on deployment, these moments are the ones they cherish the most. It makes me feel good about what I'm doing for them as a volunteer."

The battalion is scheduled to be deactivated this year and coordinators for the unit understand how valuable events like this are.

"We're excited that we got to do this for our battalion," Capistran said. "I'm honored to be part of these special moments that these girls will remember and cherish for the rest of their lives."



Petty Officer 3rd Class Jeremiah Watson, line corpsman, B Co., 3rd Combat Engineer Battalion, asks his daughter Angelina Watson, 3 years old, to a dance while on one knee during the 'Princess of the Castle' event held at the Officers' Club Feb. 7.

SECURITY, from A1

unknown enemy in the area and I got to see what the system was capable of. I definitely saw what this system could be and how it can help us."

The MDARS sees just as well at night as it does during the day. The dance has an assortment of sensors, cameras and radar that can trigger a response on its own to alert the operator.

The goal of this new system is to allow Marines to have a better view of their environment while minimizing the potential danger. Although the vehicle is not meant for combat, it can be fitted with a variety of weapon systems to make it more capable of engaging

potential combatants if necessary.

"MWSS-374 saw the interest in the system and wanted to see it fielded during ITX," said Pat Culliton, project manager, Force Protection Systems. "We're fielding the system here and showing what it can do for the ABGD."

The SPAWAR team fielded two MDARS vehicles during the ITX, one with weapons and one without. Both units were able to affectively assist in providing security around the airfield. They were able to detect enemy movements and deter advancement onto the airfield.

Despite the MDARS system's limited involvement during the ITX, the SPAWAR team was able to showcase its capabilities and successfully demonstrate how it can be utilized in an AB GD.

RECYCLE, from A1

Javier Ramirez, store administrator, Combat Center commissary. "We recycle our cardboard packaging and all the plastics we use as well."

The agency collectively recycled more than 139 million pounds of cardboard, plastic and paper in fiscal year 2013 and seeks to improve on that statistic this year.



The "plastic bag" recycling bin sits at the main entrance of the Combat Center's commissary. Plastic bag recycling is one way the Defense Commissary Agency is looking to reduce waste within the agency and in commissaries nationwide.

VETERANS, from A1

erans and their spouses by the end of 2015.

Today, 44 states have passed legislation that streamlines the process for service members and veterans to obtain civilian certification and licensure, according to a White House fact sheet.

In his remarks, Perez noted that the Labor Department's latest employment report indicates the private sector has created 8.5 million jobs over the last 47 months. The construction industry showed one of the most dramatic growth rates, he said, adding more jobs in January than in any month since March 2007.

The construction industry is expected to create more than 1.5 million jobs by 2022, Perez said, adding that the industry has long maintained a proven training and employment infrastructure.

"Through apprenticeships, certification and credentialing programs provided by labor unions and individual employers, veterans can translate their skills into in-demand civilian occupations," Perez said.

"Nearly eight percent of all registered apprentices are veterans," Perez said. "And 23 percent of apprentices are active military members learning skills in over 120 occupations ranging from airframe mechanics to firefighters."

Michelle said she and her husband, President Barack Obama, believe the nation's men and women in uniform should be able to start pursuing such careers the minute they hang up their uniforms but that the transition from military to civilian life can be difficult.

"Too many of our troops get excellent training [but] they don't always know how to translate that military experience into

The commissary collects and compacts materials on site before being sent to a recycling center to be processed. The agency is environmentally conscientious and continues to make efforts to be waste-conscious.

The Combat Center's commissary encourages customers to bring in used plastic bags to be recycled and decrease their impact on the environment.

good civilian jobs," Michelle said. "That's why in 2012, my husband launched the Department of Defense Military Credentialing and Licensing Task Force, and we're already starting to see results."

Today, Michelle added, service members nationwide participate in apprenticeships and accredited civilian training programs near their bases, and the Defense Department is working to help them apply military training toward earning civilian credentials, particularly in high-demand fields like plumbing, heating, ventilation and air conditioning.

The president has assured that veterans can use their Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits to pay for career and technical training in construction and other industries, Michelle said, and veterans and companies can find jobs and qualified employees in 2,600 American job centers across the country.

Today's commitment is about putting highly skilled individuals to work in high-paying careers and providing U.S. companies with the very best workers, but it's also about "modeling a certain set of values for our communities and for our country," Michelle said.

"By making these kinds of commitments, you all are sending a clear message that in this country we honor those who've sacrificed for us," Michelle said.

To service members and veterans in the audience and watching online, Michelle said, "Please know that America has your back, and if you ever need to be reminded of how thankful we are for everything you've done for us, take a look around this room."

"You've got representatives from some of the leading companies in America," Michelle said. "Many of whom have traveled a very long way to be here. They're all here because they want to serve you as well as you've served this country."



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WeekINPhotos

2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment



PHOTOS BY LANCE CPL CESAR CONTRERAS

[Above] A Marine from Company G, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division, suppresses a simulated enemy while Marines maneuver during the final, six-day field exercise at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center Bridgeport, Calif., Feb. 4. The Warlords and their attached units underwent the winter training package at MCMWTC to prepare for the upcoming a multi-lateral, joint exercise Cold Response, which will take place in March in Norway.

[Top, right] Marines from G Co., 2/2, 2nd Marine Division, assault a high-elevation landing zone from a CH-47 helicopter, during the final six-day field exercise for Mountain Exercise winter training package at MCMWTC Bridgeport, Calif., Jan. 31.

[Bottom, right] Pfc. Michael Humer and Lance Cpl. Ryan Albanese keep a sharp eye out for a simulated enemy during a patrol during the final six-day field exercise for Mountain Exercise winter training package at MCMWTC Bridgeport, Calif., Feb. 3.



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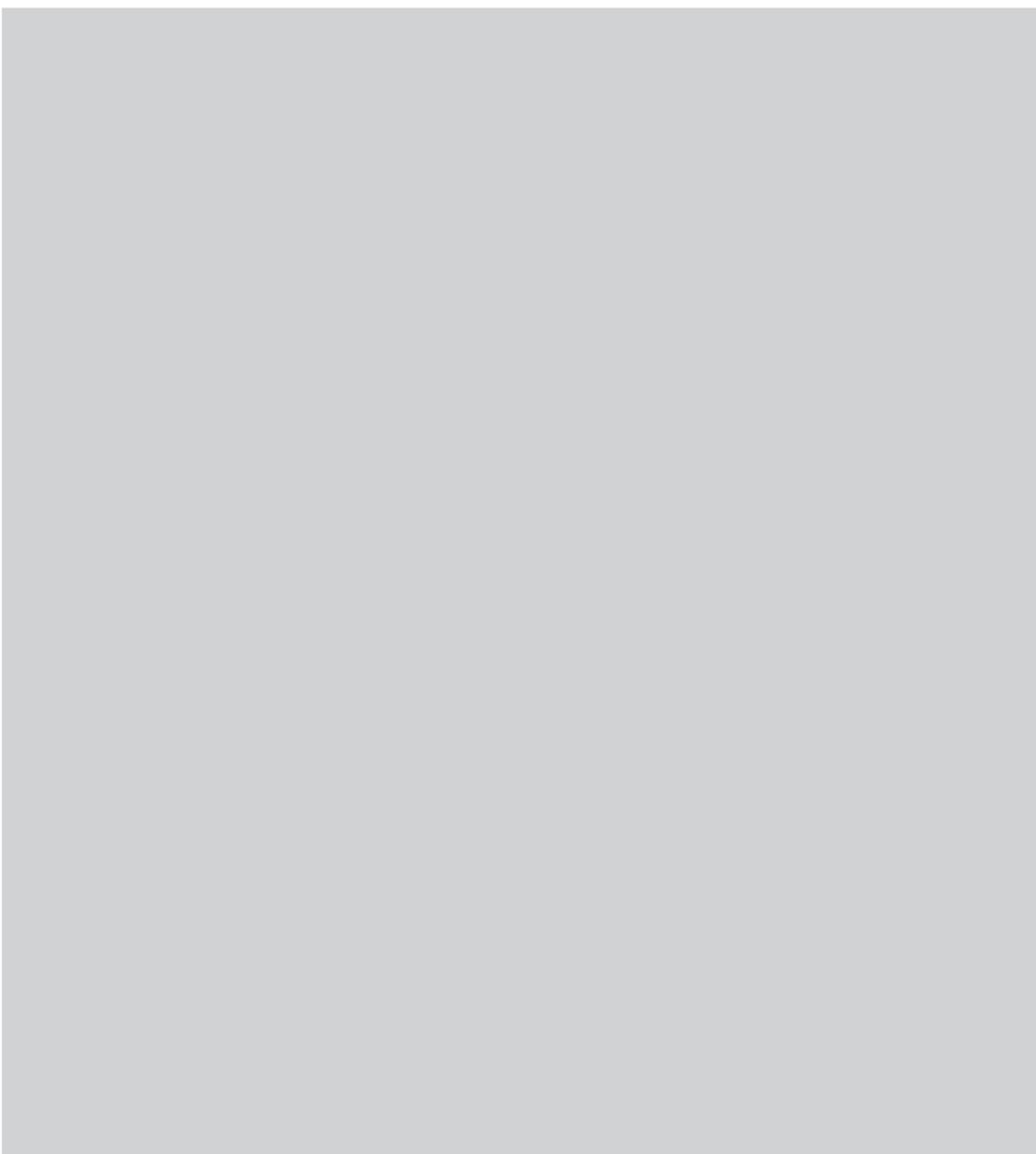
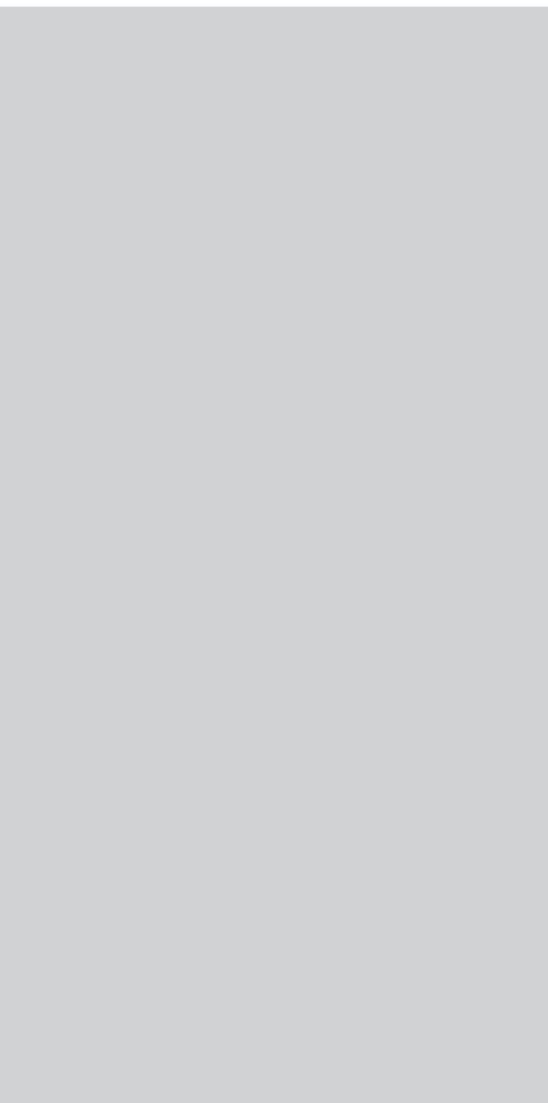
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6,000 feet above the REST

Story and Photos by CPL. ALI AZIMI

Mountain training helps Marine win championship

Danny "The Realist" Ramirez stepped into the octagon. His opponent, Arson Perry, stood across from him in the caged ring. Ramirez is ranked 14th world-wide in the International Sport Combat Federation, three ranks below Perry. It was a fight Ramirez was looking forward to. He was both calm and excited as the match began. Ramirez executed a takedown against Perry during every round of the match. In the third round, he drew blood and Perry's ear began to gush. Despite almost being choked out in the fourth, Ramirez dominated the five-round match and the judges unanimously designated him the victor. Ramirez had gone from a not-so-good, 152-pound high school wrestler, to the winner of the Reno Combat Welter Weight Championship in six years.

Sgt. Daniel Ramirez stands at 5'10" and weights in at 190 pounds, cutting down to 170 for his fights. He proudly wears a battle scar above his right eye from a front kick in his fourth fight and when he steps onto the mat, he is a force to be reckoned with.

He is currently the non-commissioned officer-in-charge of the Distribution Management Office at Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center Bridgeport, Calif., and trains daily with his three coaches at more than 6,500 ft. above sea level.

Larry Robasciotti, head coach, Andy Irving, boxing coach, and Brad Robasciotti, sparring partner, push Ramirez in every aspect of fighting and are always in his corner during a fight. His daily training is usually lasts an hour and a half, depending on how close he is to "fight night."

The North Hills, Calif., native started wrestling in his sophomore year of high school but had never tried his hand at the mixed martial arts circuit until he arrived at his current duty station in 2011.

"I wasn't always the most athletic person out there," Ramirez said. "Every sport I tried out for, I wasn't great at it. I just pushed myself harder to get better. It's amazing what your body is capable of doing when your mindset is right."

He met the coaches that inspired his MMA career in Bridgeport and soon joined the Mountain Warrior Fight Club.

Ramirez earned his black belt in the Marine Corps Martial Arts Program before ever starting MMA. It's the Corps that led him to his current success, accord-

ing to Ramirez. "The Marine Corps got me into fighting," Ramirez said. "I probably wouldn't have even looked into it. Being here, and MCMAP, kind of led me to that path."

He first saw an opportunity to fight during a routine work out.

"I wanted to get big but I didn't know they did mixed martial arts," Ramirez said. "I'd see them in there. I started going up there and the coaches were very welcoming."

"Everything they do for me they do out of love for MMA," Ramirez continued. "They take their own time to train with me, getting nothing back. Everything I do, such as the wins, I do for them because they are always there for me."

Sitting in on a training session, you almost feel sorry for Ramirez. He is put through rigorous exercises before he is put in his first fight. He grapples with Brad, who is rested and ready to fight, and after his time on the mat is done, he returns to his exercises. This is a cycle Larry has Ramirez continue until his body is exhausted.

"My biggest thing is cardio," Ramirez said. "Being here, at this elevation, we schedule everything around cardio. You don't ever want to gas out."

Ramirez doesn't have the full set of training equipment you'd expect a title-holding fighter to have. His gear is minimal; a mat, jump ropes and



Sgt. Daniel Ramirez trains at more than 6,000 ft above sea level. There are a few items he is never without when training for his next fight; his sponsor's shirt, music, beanie and gym bag. Although he trains in an area with lower oxygen levels, he uses an oxygen deprivation mask to intensify his cardiovascular training.

some speed and punching bags. Despite the lack of equipment, Ramirez has excelled in the sport. He believes his life in the Marine Corps has taught him to surpass this obstacle.

"We don't have everything we need in training," Ramirez said. "But there's a mentality to adapt and overcome; the 'not giving up' type of attitude."

He attributes much of his success to the environment in which he trains, including getting out of the choke in the match that earned him his title as champion. However, his coaches give credit elsewhere.

"His work ethic is incredible, because we put him through hell," Larry said. "He is tenacious and a little cocky, but that's good in this game."

Ramirez has two sponsors and holds a record of five wins to one loss, with another fight coming up in March.

"I'm thinking about having two more fights and then turning pro and starting my career there," Ramirez said.

At his core, Ramirez loves to fight. It is where his future and his heart lie. He smiles when talking of past fights and looks forward to the grueling training.

"With every fight, you get better and know what you have to do differently," Ramirez said. "At the end of the day it pays off. It's like everything I went through was totally worth it."

After eight years of service, Ramirez plans on getting out of the Marine Corps later this year. He hopes to continue his fighting career in the civilian world after returning to his home town in North Hills, Calif.

He'll take with him the Marine Corps values, of honor, courage, and what he believes to be most important, commitment.

"You have to be committed," Ramirez said. "You have to be stammered if you're going to be successful in anything. That's one [Corps value] that I will be taking with me."

To follow Daniel Ramirez, visit <https://facebook.com/REALCOLDWARRIOR>.



Sgt. Daniel Ramirez trains with Larry Robasciotti, head coach, at the Marine Corps Mountain Warfare Training Center, Bridgeport's gym, Feb. 3. Ramirez is currently ranked 14th world-wide in the ISCF league and plans to go pro.



Sunset Cinema

Friday, Feb. 14

4:30 p.m. – The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, PG
 7:30 p.m. – 47 Ronin 3-D, PG-13
 10:30 p.m. – Grudge Match, PG-13
 1 a.m. – Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones, R

Saturday, Feb. 15

10:30 a.m. – Free Admission Madagascar 2, PG
 12:30 p.m. – Walking with Dinosaurs 3-D, PG
 3 p.m. – 47 Ronin, PG-13
 6 p.m. – The Legend of Hercules 3-D, PG-13
 8:30 p.m. – Grudge Match, PG-13
 11:30 p.m. – Lone Survivor, R

Sunday, Feb. 16

11 a.m. – Paranormal Activity: The Marked Ones, R
 2 p.m. – The Nut Job 3-D, PG
 4:30 p.m. – The Legend of Hercules, PG-13
 7 p.m. – 47 Ronin, PG-13
 10 p.m. – Ride Along, PG-13

Monday, Feb. 17

3 p.m. – American Hustle, R
 5:30 p.m. – Lone Survivor, R

Tuesday, Feb. 18

5 p.m. – The Legend of Hercules 3-D, PG-13
 7:30 p.m. – The Secret Life of Walter Mitty, PG

Wednesday, Feb. 19

5 p.m. – Walking with Dinosaurs 3-D, PG
 7:30 p.m. – Lone Survivor, R

Thursday, Feb. 20

5 p.m. – Grudge Match, PG-13
 7 p.m. – 47 Ronin, PG-13

Star power can't keep food-centric romantic drama out of the mush

NEIL POND

"Labor Day"

Starring: Josh Brolin & Kate Winslet
 Directed Jason Reitman
 PG-13, 111 mins

An escaped murderer from the state prison shanghai's a single mother and her 13-year-old son, forcing them to drive him to their New England home. Then he ties the mom to a chair.

At this point, you might be thinking of several places a chilling scenario like this could lead. But only in the overheated, food-fantasy romance-drama that is "Labor Day" would hunky con-on-the-lam Frank (Josh Brolin) begin spoon-feeding lovelorn, rope-restrained divorcee Adele (Kate Winslet) a hot meal of his homemade chili, then proceed to fill the big, empty hole in her heart.

Based on a 2009 novel by Joyce Maynard, "Labor Day" is set over the steamy three-day 1987 weekend of its title, as Frank then bonds with Adele and her son, Henry (Gattlin Griffith), and they become a "family" despite their unusual, unorthodox and stressful situation. It is hard to have a relaxing barbecue, tune up the station wagon in the driveway or play a game of backyard baseball, after all, with a nosy neighbor (J.K. Simmons) dropping by to remind you of the dangerous felon on the loose, or the local cop (James Van Der Beek from TV's "How I Met Your Mother") tacking up "Wanted" posters and constantly patrolling past your house in his cruiser.

If you don't already know by the time things get to the "pie scene," those three squishy minutes alone will likely decide just how much of this hook, line and sinker hooley

you're willing to swallow. As Frank tutors Adele and Henry in making a peach confection ("A little bit of tapioca," he purrs, guiding Adele's shaking hands to sprinkle the seasoning "like salt over an icy road..."), it'll either strike you as one of the most beautiful, erotic things you've ever seen, or a ridiculous, hoot-worthy spoof the two stars could be doing on an episode of "Saturday Night Live."

And the movie totally overcooks its symbolism that homemade food means real love, stability and family bonding, while restaurant meals and fast-food milkshakes represent shallow men who leave good women, families split apart by divorce and parents who don't know how to communicate with their kids.

Director Jason Reitman has made some fine movies, including "Juno," "Up in the Air" and "Thank You For Smoking," with some real satirical bite and teeth. But this film doesn't have any bite, or teeth, because it's mostly mush. Brolin and Winslet, fine actors both, do their best, but they're fighting an undertow in a sea of cheese, and the movie fails to fan their coals of passion into anything resembling a flame. Young Griffith gets his own subplot as Henry navigates the emotional minefield of teenage hormones.

(If you're reading the opening credits—and listening closely to the narration — it won't be much of a surprise to find out the identity of the recognizable actor who pops in to play grown-up Henry at the end of the movie.)

"I came to save you," Frank tells Adele. Well, you might save me another slice of that peach pie, or a bowl of that chili, or one of those breakfast scones, but nothing else on the menu of this preposterous holiday roma-drama is worth reheating.

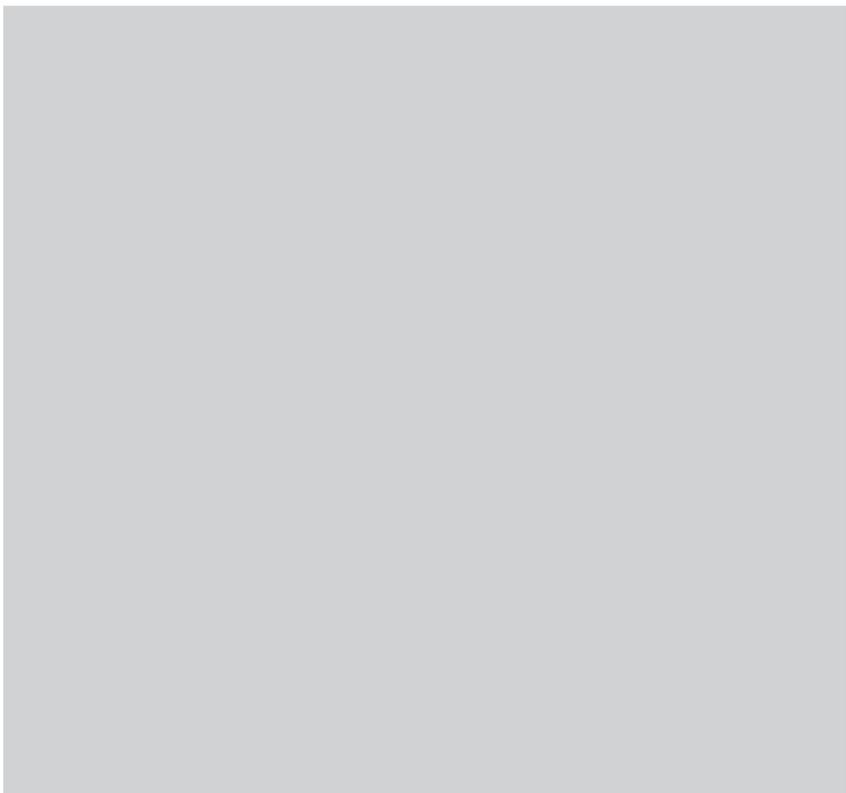
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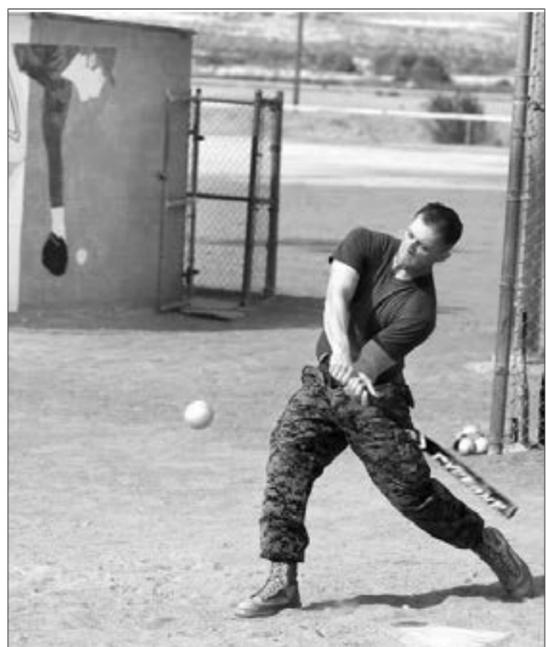
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 Whatever you're looking for, you can find it in the **Observation Post Classified section**



BATTLE among BROTHERS

Photos by CPL. ALI AZIMI



[Above] Cpl. Bret Mathews and Lance Cpl. Jeffrey Wallis, infantrymen, represent Company K in the Humvee pull during 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine's Sports Day at Del Valle Field, Feb. 7. The day hosted a series of games pitting the companies of the battalion against each other to inspire friendly competition.

[Top, right] A Marine with Company L, 3/4, reaches for the ball during a game of flag football against Headquarters & Service Co. as part of the battalion's Sports Day at Del Valle Field, Feb. 7. The day featured competitive sports, music and barbecue for the Marines and sailors of the battalion.

[Right] Cpl. Joe Sanchez, infantryman, Company I, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, steps up to bat during the unit's sports day at Del Valle Field, Feb. 7. The battalion is scheduled to be deactivated in May.



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1st Tanks

Culinary Skills



CPL. ALI AZIMI



CPL. ALI AZIMI



CPL. ALI AZIMI



CPL. ALI AZIMI

[Top, left] Chris Ryan, sous chef, Officer's Club, led spouses in the first-ever 1st Tank Battalion Cooking Class at the Officers' Club, Tuesday. **[Bottom, left]** Spouses of 1st Tanks Marines work together to make coleslaw from scratch, during the 1st Tanks Cooking Class at the Officers' Club, Tuesday. The event featured raffle prizes and was led by Sous Chef Chris Ryan. **[Top, right]** Allison Ashinhurst, wife of Capt. Chris Ashinhurst, company commander, Company D, 1st Tanks, cooks with Kelly Stone, wife of 2nd Lt. Stephen Stone, tank officer, Company B, 1st Tanks, during the Battalion's Cooking Class at the Officers' Club, Tuesday. **[Bottom, right]** Chris Ryan, sous chef, Officers' Club, teaches the 1st Tanks Cooking Class at the Officers' Club, Tuesday. The participants of the class learned how to use leftover pot roast to make sliders and tacos.

Cooking class introduces new recipes, friends

Cpl. Ali Azimi
Combat Correspondent

The 1st Tank Battalion Cooking Class brought together spouses of the battalion for a night of food and friends at the Officers' Club, Tuesday.

This event marked the battalion's first cooking class. The class introduced the spouses of the battalion to one another and was led by Chris Ryan, sous chef of the Officers' Club.

"It helps to build support networks for spouses within the battalion," said Jany Wasdin, family readiness officer, 1st Tanks. "Twenty-nine Palms isn't the end of the world, although you might be able to see it from here, and you can make really strong bonds here."

The event started out with an odd ice breaker. Each spouse was put in the spotlight and admitted to the strangest thing they'd ever eaten. Some came out with an unusual animal, such as elk or alligator, while others confessed to liver, pig's feet and cow tongue.

After getting acquainted amongst each other, the ladies started shaping their culinary creations.

They learned how to use leftover pot roast to make barbecue beef sliders and shredded beef tacos. Although the pot roast was pre-made, an eight-hour process, the participants made all the trimmings from scratch.

The ingredients were laid out before them and they followed Ryan through the steps to make cole slaw, pico de gallo and cilantro-lime cream for their tacos and sliders.

The spouses were able to enjoy their creations at the end of the class as they sat down together at a large dinner table to talk and best of all, eat what they had just made.

"I don't know very many people in the battalion right now and this was fun," said Amy Cappadony, wife of Gunnery Sgt. Ryan

Cappadony, platoon sergeant, 1st Tanks.

The battalion tries to have an event like this every month, according to Wasdin, and many of the participants from the cooking class are looking forward to it.

"It helps to build support networks for spouses within the battalion."

— Jany Wasdin