

## Thanksgiving with a new family

Page 26

## Honoring 9/11 heroes

Page 8

## Robinson ES earns Blue Ribbon School award

Page 23

## Celebrating diverse cultures

Page 5





**UNITED STATES ARMY  
GARRISON STUTTGART  
Commander**  
Col. Kirk Alexander

**Senior Enlisted Adviser**  
Command Sgt. Maj.  
Denice Malave

**Public Affairs Officer**  
Dayna Rowden

**Managing Editor**  
Bardia Khajenoori

**Contributors**  
Angelika Aguilar, Nano Betts, Bill  
Butler, Presley Chacon, Chaplain  
(Col.) David Curlin, Rachael Long,  
Marnessa Rea, Michael Roach,  
Balmira Sehra, Kai Vollmer,  
Mackenzie Welsh

**USAG STUTTGART  
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**  
Building 2949, Panzer Kaserne

**Army Post Office  
Mailing Address**  
Unit 30401, APO AE 09107

**German Mailing Address**  
Panzer Kaserne Geb. 2949,  
3rd Floor, Panzerstrasse,  
70032 Böblingen

**Website**  
[www.StuttgartCitizen.com](http://www.StuttgartCitizen.com)

**Facebook**  
[www.facebook.com/USAGarrisonStuttgart](http://www.facebook.com/USAGarrisonStuttgart)

**PUBLISHER/VERLAG**

**AdvantiPro GmbH**  
Europapallee 3  
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**Telephone**  
+49 (0) 631-30 3355 30

**Website**  
[www.AdvantiPro.com](http://www.AdvantiPro.com)

**Managing Director**  
Bret Helenius

**Concept, design & layout:**  
Alexander Pütz, Marina Richter

**ADVERTISING/WERBUNG**

**Contact**  
Jennifer Holdsworth

**Telephone**  
+49 (0) 631-30 3355 37

**Email**  
[Ads@StuttgartCitizen.com](mailto:Ads@StuttgartCitizen.com)

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## TO OUR USAG STUTTGART FAMILY:

Autumn has traditionally been a time to celebrate abundance and prepare for the dark, cold months of winter. This period marks the beginning of gathering and giving thanks—whether it's bringing in the harvest, cheering on our favorite teams from the stands, or coming together with family and friends to count our blessings.

This edition of The Citizen features stories highlighting the power of gratitude to lift us up, bring us together, and remind us why we're glad to call Stuttgart home.

We are grateful for three new members of The Citizen team from Stuttgart High School's Career Practicum Program: Mackenzie, Presley, and Marnessa. In this edition, you'll read their insightful contributions on mental health awareness, diversity celebrations at Patch Elementary School, and a check-in on the high school's fall sports teams.

In the Chaplain's Corner, you'll find insight on how cultivating gratitude can build resilience, improve well-being, and even increase overall happiness. You'll also read about how the Stuttgart Jewish Military Community gathered to celebrate the start of the High Holidays.

We highlight other gatherings that celebrate friendship and shared experiences, including an article about this year's Soldiers' Fest and one about an impromptu cross-cultural Thanksgiving dinner that has become an annual tradition for a USAG Stuttgart family.

Just as autumn marks a season of giving thanks, it is also a season of change. Soldiers preparing to separate or retire can benefit from our article about the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and how a veteran, alongside the garrison, is assisting with that transition.

In this season of change, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Command Sgt. Maj. Denice Malave for her dedicated service to our garrison. As she transitions to a new role in Kaiserslautern, we are deeply grateful for her leadership and her commitment to the Stuttgart community. We wish her the best in her next chapter, and we are certain she will continue to inspire excellence.

We are also excited to welcome her successor, Command Sgt. Maj. Chris Melendez, who will assume responsibility on Nov. 7. We look forward to his leadership and the new perspectives he will bring to our community.

Throughout this issue, you'll notice some common autumn themes: gratitude, celebration, and change. We hope these articles inform and inspire you during this season of transition. As you read through, we encourage you to celebrate your own achievements and experiences from the past year, and take stock of your many blessings.

As the weather cools, our hearts warm with gratitude. We are honored to inform, engage, inspire, and connect with our community.

*Col. Kirk Alexander*

Commander, U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart





**Cover image:**

Iconic picture of Bavaria with Maria Gern church with Hochkalter peak on background. Photo by Andrew Mayovskyy/Shutterstock.com



Athletes and coaches of the U.S. Paralympic swim team pose for a group portrait in the courtyard of Stuttgart's Neues Schloss Aug. 23, joined by Peter Faber (top left) and Angelika Aguilar (bottom right), of the USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs Office (Community Relations). The visit downtown capped off a weeklong training camp based at Panzer Kaserne for the 33-member Team USA ahead of their departure to Paris for the 2024 Paralympic Games, where they earned a total of 30 medals in para-swimming events.

Photo by Bardia Khajenoori, USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	<b>Commander's Note</b>	10	Asst. Sec. Def. Keohane visits USAG Stuttgart	20 & 21	<b>Employee Spotlight</b> - Pfc. Josiah Edness - Sandra Smith
4	<b>Chaplain's Corner:</b> - The healing power of gratitude - Jewish High Holidays begin with sweet traditions	11	Be the face of change: donate to this year's CFC	22	Winter safety starts with preparation
5	Patch Elem. Fosters community through culture	12	Caring for ourselves and each other: wellness in focus	23	Robinson Barracks Elementary recognized as a 2024 National Blue Ribbon School
6 & 7	<b>From the Historian:</b> Eight decades on - a look back at Stuttgart's former military installations	13	ACS expert offers tips on settling in after an OCONUS Move	24	Allied Service Members forge friendships at Soldiers' Fest
8	Garrison remembers fallen 9/11 first responders during memorial event	14 & 15	MWR events to be excited about this fall & winter	25	Visitors driving your car? Know the customs rules
		16	Past experience, present opportunity, future value: TAP Center has it all	26	Creating memories, sharing traditions
		18 & 19	Panthers on the prowl: SHS fall sports teams tackle new season	27	<b>The Big Question:</b> Why are you glad you live here?

# Chaplain's Corner: The healing power of gratitude

Photo by Maria Marganingsih/Shutterstock.com

**Gratitude**  
will give you more patience,  
understanding, compassion,  
and kindness.

**By Chaplain (Col.) David Curlin**

USAG Stuttgart Command Chaplain

Do you regularly feel irritated? Dissatisfied? Unhappy? Perhaps what you're missing is a powerful dose of gratitude. When discontent or frustration sneaks into our lives, gratitude offers a way out, guiding us back toward joy, kindness, and fulfillment.

## The Subtle Drift Away from Happiness

It's easy to lose sight of the things we are grateful for, especially when we spend more time focusing on what we lack or what we think we deserve. This unhappy mindset can manifest in subtle ways—expecting things to go our way, becoming frustrated when they don't, or feeling that what we have isn't

enough. This shift in perspective, however, can push our attention farther from what brings joy and robs us of the ability to see and fully appreciate the blessings in our lives.

## The Power of Gratitude

Expressing gratitude, on the other hand, focuses our minds on our blessings. Gratitude helps us to focus on what we have instead of what we think we're missing. It reminds us of the good in our lives and frees us from dissatisfaction and comparison. By turning our focus from scarcity to abundance, gratitude nurtures happiness and kindness, making it difficult to remain unhappy or unkind.

Gratitude is more than just an attitude; it's a practice. When we intentionally cultivate gratitude, we shift our focus to the positive aspects of our experiences and the efforts of others. It allows us to see life through a lens of appreciation, which in turn fosters joy, empathy, and deeper connections.

One of the most profound effects of gratitude is its ability to enhance our relationships. When we practice gratitude, it activates parts of our brain that are responsible for social bonding and connection. This not only improves our relationships with others but also deepens our spiritual relationships, including our connection with God. Gratitude opens the door to greater empathy, kindness, and community, all of which are essential for our emotional and spiritual well-being.

## Gratitude Builds Resilience

Gratitude also strengthens our ability to face challenges. It doesn't mean we ignore difficulties or settle for less. Instead, gratitude allows us to approach challenges with grace, maintaining a balanced perspective even in tough situations. By appreciating the good in our lives, we build resilience that helps us navigate difficult circumstances without becoming overwhelmed by negativity. This shift in mindset fosters emotional strength and spiritual peace, helping us maintain our well-being despite life's inevitable challenges.

## Misunderstandings About Gratitude

Some may fear that embracing gratitude will lead to passivity or prevent us from standing up for what's right. On the contrary, gratitude is about balance. It equips us to acknowledge our frustrations and work towards change while still appreciating the good. Gratitude allows us to approach life's difficulties with grace and joy, without forfeiting our contentment.

## Conclusion

In a world that often highlights what we lack, gratitude serves as a powerful remedy. By cultivating gratitude, whether it be through prayer, thank-you letters, journals, or even just counting our blessings, we invite more joy and kindness into our lives. Gratitude offers us a way to remain resilient, content, and connected, leading to a happier, more fulfilled life.



A child blows a shofar, a ram's horn symbolizing awakening and renewal. It marks the Jewish New Year and calls for self-reflection and repentance.

**Story and photos by Dayna Rowden**

USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

As the sun dipped below the horizon on the evening of Oct. 2, members and friends of the Stuttgart Jewish Military Community welcomed the new year, 5725, with a sweet Rosh Hashanah dinner on Panzer Kaserne.

Members brought in traditional foods such as

## Jewish High Holidays begin with sweet traditions

round loaves of challah (bread)—which serve to remind us of the never-ending cycle of life, tzimmes—a sweet stew made of honey, carrots and dried fruits, pomegranates, and of course, apples dipped in honey to signify our wish for a sweet year.

The two days of Rosh Hashanah, which means “head of the year,” mark a time of rejoicing in completing one year and taking stock of one's life as the new year begins. They are the beginning of the Jewish “High Holidays” and usher in the “Ten Days of Awe (or Repentance),” which culminate in the major fast day of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and the holiest day in Judaism.

Being an American Jew stationed in Stuttgart comes with a unique set of challenges. First, there is only one U.S. rabbi chaplain permanently stationed in Europe, so he has many different communities to serve. Next, while there are a few small, local Jewish

congregations, the services are only conducted in German and Hebrew. Learning to read Hebrew is hard enough, don't get me started on German grammar.

The Stuttgart Jewish Military Community—run by lay leaders Alan and Kristie Beny—serves the U.S. military Jewish community here by organizing opportunities to bring Jews together for fun and meaningful events throughout the year.

Lighting candles is a ritual performed at the onset of Jewish holidays and signifies the beginning of a sacred time.





# Patch Elem. Fosters Community Through Culture



Authentic, home-cooked food provided by volunteers plays a role in each celebration, pictured here during the Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month festival. Photo by Bardia Khajenoori

By **Marnessa Rea**

Stuttgart High School Career Practicum Student

Patch Elementary School (PES) transformed into a lively celebration of Hispanic culture during its Hispanic Heritage Month celebration Sept. 20, bringing the community together through food, music, and artistic expression. Participants experienced the richness of Hispanic traditions firsthand with activities like dominos, face painting, and Mexican paper crafts, while performances paid tribute to the legacy of Mexican-American singer Selena Quintanilla.

Abraham Ruiz, a PES third grader and member of the Diversity Club, shared how much he enjoyed the evening, especially having his friends join him on stage. "My favorite part was just seeing my friends up there just participate and dance with me," he said.

As his mother performed for an audience of more than 200, singing a selection of popular Mexican songs—including one of his great-grandfather's favorites—Abraham felt proud of his friends' support and the way the music connected him to his cultural and ancestral heritage.

"That is why friends are so important, they're always there for you," he added.

The event left a lasting impression on both children and adults. For Shea Chapa, a PES teacher's aide and military brat who attended many different schools, these kinds of events allow students to see their own cultures—and those of their friends—celebrated. She emphasized how important it is for military kids to feel confident in their heritage, especially in such a diverse setting.

The sense of togetherness fostered by Hispanic Heritage Night is part of a larger effort to create inclusive, meaningful events that celebrate the diversity within the school and the wider military community.

"It brings a little bit of home overseas," said Dr. Joi Mitchell, PES school counselor and Diversity Club sponsor, who has made it her mission to produce

events that celebrate the unique cultures within the community while encouraging broad participation.

Her commitment to inclusivity was deepened last year after a conversation with a young student of Korean ancestry.

"You know, Dr. Joi, I don't mind celebrating everybody else's culture, but, when it's time for mine, they don't do anything," Mitchell recalled the student saying.

That conversation inspired her to create a more comprehensive program that celebrates cultural differences on a larger scale, ensuring that every student feels represented and valued.

As a counselor, Mitchell has seen firsthand how adaptable and accepting DoDEA students are. She notes that they are used to frequent change and always ready to welcome new students, no matter their background, and believes the cultural festivals provide a safe space where students can be proud of who they are while celebrating their peers.

In a particularly powerful moment during a Black History Month celebration, Mitchell recalled a white second grader performing a slave narrative with such passion that the child's own ethnicity became irrelevant.

"It wasn't even the thought that she was white, it was the thought that she was delivering history and was so proud to do it," Mitchell said.

The cultural festivals at Patch Elementary extend beyond just the school—they're free and open to the entire military community, welcoming anyone eager to celebrate diversity. With traditional cuisine, lively performances, and a spirit of fellowship, these events bring people together and highlight how differences can be celebrated rather than simply acknowledged. They foster a sense of unity and send a clear message: diversity is something to be proud of. Through these festivals, students and families not only embrace their own heritage but also gain a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of cultures around them.

Marnessa Rea is a Stuttgart High School senior working with the USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs Office as part of DoDEA's Career Practicum program.



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# From the Historian: Eight decades on - a look back at Stuttgart's former military installations

By Bill Butler

U.S. European Command Historian

Next year will mark the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and the arrival of the first American troops to the Stuttgart region. In the eight decades since, the U.S. military community here has served as a vital strategic forward presence and faithfully played a key role in America's contributions to NATO. At one time, more than 40,000 U.S. service members called the city and its surrounding region their home abroad. In addition, thousands of civilians and dependents also made up what was once called the Greater Stuttgart Military Community (GSMC). The following are brief historical snapshots of various posts that once served this community, but are no longer a part of the 'garrison's continuing mission.

The commercial district in Bad Cannstatt known today as the Römerkastell, or Roman Fort, once served as **Wallace Barracks** and the smaller adjoining post of **McGee Barracks**. Although the buildings that still make up this complex date from the early 1900s, they lay atop the remains of an encampment that constituted the ancient Roman garrison of Cannstatt. The modern barracks were originally built from 1908 to 1910 by the Kingdom of Württemberg to accommodate the 18th Cavalry Regiment, and the post was given the name Koenigsdragoner Kaserne. During World War I, and later in World War II, it functioned as a training and replacement center and also briefly housed French prisoners of war. Its proximity to industrial sites located along the Neckar River often meant it fell within the target areas of Allied strategic bombardment missions that were striking nearby factories and the rail lines leading out of town. Troops of the 100th Infantry Division



The former Bad Cannstatt Army Hospital seen in 1955.

Photos courtesy of the U.S. European Command Historian

were the first Americans to arrive in late April 1945. Upon their incorporation into the larger Stuttgart American garrison, the posts were renamed after Medal of Honor recipients, Army Pfc. Herman Wallace and Pvt. William McGee. Wallace Barracks served primarily as a garrison support center and was home to the 66th Military Intelligence Group, while McGee functioned mostly as a small administrative center for the American Red Cross. Both sites were turned over to the German government in 1993 and were later repurposed by the City of Stuttgart.

The former **Bad Cannstatt Army Hospital**, once home to the 5th General Hospital, operated on the site of an earlier German medical complex. On a plot of land not far from the Neckar River, construction of the hospital began in 1879. Two years later, six original buildings had been completed. New facilities were added on a regular basis until 1937, when the German military medical service took over what was then known as the Municipal Hospital Bad Cannstatt. Suffering only minor damage during the war, its buildings were initially used by French occupation forces, and from summer 1945 onwards by a series of American medical units including the 216th General Hospital, the 387th Station Hospital, and the 11th Field Hospital. The 5th General Hospital took over operation of the facility in 1951 and remained until it was



handed over to the Stuttgart municipal government in 1992.

## The Böblingen Main-tenance Plant was

located on land originally cleared prior to World War I as an

Imperial German military airfield with associated training facilities. The site later served as the Stuttgart area's municipal airport until that activity moved to Echterdingen in the 1930s. During World War II, it was used as a repair and replacement facility until U.S. forces took it over in the summer of 1945. The U.S. Army operated a vehicle repair depot there, which was eventually contracted out to Daimler Benz from 1956 to 1975. The former airfield buildings continued as a general repair and storage location supporting the GSMC until they were formally returned to the German government in 1992. Today it is better known as the Flugfeld area of businesses, offices, hotels, and apartment residences.

Located on the ridgetop above Esslingen am Neckar, the former **Funker Kaserne** was developed by the German Army from 1937 to 1938. It was built to house motorized radio signals battalions and served as a maintenance depot for their mobile radio station vehicles (Funkenwagen). When American troops first arrived in summer 1945, they continued to operate it as a vehicle maintenance and repair facility. In early 1946, the 7845th Ordnance Maintenance Group activated to assume that support mission. The organization utilized local German nationals to accomplish most of the work, and two years later, an arrangement was made with the nearby Daimler Benz factory to provide oversight of predominantly Jeep refurbishment and repair. The 7845th was then





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# Greater Stuttgart Military Community



Kornwestheim and Ludwigsburg, approximately 11 miles north of downtown Stuttgart. It was built in the early 1950s as an expanded family residential area for the surrounding military community. Named after Gen. George Patton, it served as home to thousands of military families and hosted the Stuttgart American High School from 1955-1992. Its golf course remains open as an associated facility of the current Stuttgart garrison.

Ludwigsburg hosted several American posts because of the large number of military kasernes located around the former Württemberg royal palace there. **Coffey Barracks** was located

Koblenz in 1951. During its time in U.S. service, it housed elements of the 30th Medical Group and various engineer units, as well as overseeing the adjacent Osterholz Storage Point. **Murphy Barracks** was originally constructed in Ludwigsburg during the period from 1872 to 1873 for the Württemberg Army, with additional buildings added in 1936-37. It was originally named Mathilden Kaserne after Queen Charlotte Augusta Matilda (1766-1828), who was the wife of King Friedrich I of Württemberg and the daughter of King George III of England. The installation served primarily as an artillery arsenal up through World War II. Following American occupation in 1947, the post was named after Medal of Honor recipient Army Pfc. Frederick C. Murphy. The post hosted an Army communications center until it was returned to the German government in 1990 during some of the initial post-Cold War closure actions. Northern portions of the former **Valdez Barracks** located within the city limits were built as early as 1881, with southern portions being completed by 1891. The post was originally named Reinhardt Kaserne to commemorate Gustav Walther Reinhardt (1872-1930), who became General of Infantry and also the last Prussian War Minister. He later commanded Military District V (Württemberg). Throughout its period of German service, the kaserne was primarily a training facility – initially for transportation, and later, for air defense units. Following U.S. occupation in 1946, it was renamed after Medal of Honor recipient Pfc. Jose F. Valdez and served as a repair and re-construction facility for Army Quartermaster stores serving the wider GSMC area.

replaced by the 6930th Civilian Labor Group that oversaw similar operations at the post until it was returned to German control in 1992.

The **Pattonville Family Housing** complex was situated on the outskirts of the city boundaries of

northwest of town and originally named Fromman Kaserne. It served as primarily an infantry barracks. After American troops occupied the post, it was named after Army U.S. Ordnance notable Brig. Gen. John W. Coffey, who was killed in an airplane crash near

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## Garrison remembers fallen 9/11 first responders during memorial event

By Balmina Sehra

USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

U.S. Army Garrison Stuttgart held an event Sept. 11 to remember the fallen and honor the first responders who answered the call of duty during one of the largest terrorist attacks to take place on American soil.

USAG Stuttgart's Family and MWR hosted the 9/11 Memorial Stair Climbs at the garrison's four fitness centers to pay tribute to the emergency personnel who responded after the attacks on the World Trade Center's twin towers in New York City on Sept 11, 2001.

During the event, participants used the fitness centers' tread climber machines to replicate the staircases used during evacuation and rescue efforts. Climbers could finish the event and ring a bell after reaching the 78th floor, which represented the highest floor reached by the 9/11 first responders, or continue to the 110th floor, the full height of the towers, to symbolically complete the heroic journey to save others.

A total of 24 people participated in the memorial challenge. Some climbers, including Spc. Jeremias Cruz and Spc. David Camargo of the 554th Military

Police Company, were born after the 9/11 attacks.

"I was surprised to see many participants take part who weren't even born when the attacks took place," said William Watson, garrison sports coordinator. "It shows they still have patriotism in their hearts, that they still care and remember the first responders who lost their lives on that day."

According to the New York City Fire Department, 343 firefighters were killed on the day of the attack, and another 360 have since died from illnesses related to the response.

Sebastian Rock was one of two members of the USAG Stuttgart Fire Department who took part in the 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb in full gear to commemorate their fallen comrades.

"Although it was hot doing the challenge in full gear, I was enjoying myself and decided to push myself to the 110th floor," Rock said. "It was a great feeling being able to accomplish that while carrying roughly 30 lbs. I'm glad I'm able to show my respect to the people who lost their lives that day."

According to the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation (NFFF), the first 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb was held in Denver in 2005. Its organizers later partnered with NFFF to create a template that



USAG Stuttgart Firefighter Sebastian Rock climbed 110 floors in full gear to commemorate the sacrifice of fallen comrades on 9/11.

Photo courtesy Family & MWR Marketing

would enable coordinators to successfully replicate a 9/11 Memorial Stair Climb anywhere.

"This event serves as a reminder to 'never forget' what these people and their families went through and what they sacrificed for us," Watson said. "When everyone else ran out, they ran in."



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Keohane (center) shares a laugh during a visit to the Patch Commissary, flanked by Store Director Scott Harmon (left) and Deputy Store Director Donald Camper (right).

Photo by Bardia Khajenoori

## ASST. SEC. DEF. KEOHANE VISITS USAG STUTTGART



Keohane presents Cory Hoffman, garrison Outdoor Recreation director, with a challenge coin.

Photo by Balmina Sehra

**By Bardia Khajenoori**

USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

The Hon. Ronald Keohane, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, visited USAG Stuttgart from Sept. 16-18. Mrs. Patricia Barron, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Family Policy; Mr. Zev Goldrich, the Principal Director for Civilian Personnel Policy; and Ms. Tracy Pakulniewicz, Mr. Keohane's senior advisor, joined the assistant secretary on his visit.

While in Stuttgart to attend U.S. European Command's J1 Sym-posium, he and his party met with garrison leadership, toured the Patch Commissary, and stopped by two of the community's schools: Stuttgart High, where SHS culinary arts students prepared lunch, and Patch Elementary. During his visits to the schools, Keohane interacted with student ambassadors and faculty members, and gained a first-hand look at the new DoDEA Universal Pre-K program in action.



Keohane (left) is welcomed to Stuttgart High School by Principal Michael Jimerson (center-right).

Photo by Balmina Sehra



Keohane (second from right) and Pakulniewicz pose with a group of culinary arts students, student ambassadors, and an instructor during a visit to Stuttgart High School.

Photo by Balmina Sehra

Keohane's briefing with garrison leadership covered several civilian personnel matters of interest, as well as key quality-of-life initiatives, including the garrison's Child and Youth Services (CYS) Pre-K program, which complements and supports DoDEA's efforts. He also presented two garrison staff members – Brian Buechner, Chief of Plans and Operations,

and Cory Hoffman, Outdoor Recreation Director – with challenge coins for excellence.

Among his many responsibilities, Mr. Keohane maintains oversight of both the Defense Commissary Agency and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA).



Stuttgart High School Culinary Arts prepared a special lunch for the official party during their visit to the school and sat down together to enjoy it.

Photo by Balmina Sehra





# BE THE FACE OF CHANGE: DONATE TO THIS YEAR'S CFC

By **Balmina Sehra**  
USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is the official workplace giving campaign for federal employees and retirees. It allows donors to support the causes they care about by making it easy to give to any number of thousands of participating charities from one place. It is one of the world's largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaigns.

Since its inception, CFC has raised nearly \$8.7 billion, making it one of the world's largest and most successful workplace charity campaigns.

Federal employees and retirees can pledge monetary support or volunteer time online, through a paper pledge form, or through the CFC Giving Mobile App.

"By giving through the CFC, Stuttgart community members can make a real difference in our area, across the nation, and around the world," said USAG Stuttgart Garrison Commander Col. Kirk Alexander.

The official solicitation period runs from Sept. 1, 2024 through Jan. 15, 2025, so there is still plenty of time to donate!

If you would like to donate, visit the CFC Donor Pledging System (<https://cfcgiving.opm.gov>) to create an account and pledge to the charities of your choice. Codes for USAG Stuttgart are "JEJAWJ" (civilian) and "VPYNH5" (military).



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## CARING FOR OURSELVES AND EACH OTHER:

# WELLNESS IN FOCUS

ASAP hosted "Stronger Together at Sunrise" to offer a chance to enable community members to step outside their usual routine, focus on mental and physical wellness, and be reminded of the benefits of a strong support system. Photos by Bardia Khajenoori

By Presley Chacon

Stuttgart High School Career Practicum Student

Taking care of your mental health can be just as important as your physical health, especially in busy, high-pressure environments like military communities. Whether it's exercising, taking time for yourself, or leaning on a support system, having healthy outlets can make a big difference.

In mid-September, the Army Substance Abuse Program (ASAP) organized a sunrise yoga session on Panzer Kaserne to help bring people together for just these reasons. The event, called "Stronger Together at Sunrise," invited members of the community to step outside their usual routine, take a breath, and practice yoga as a way to focus on both mental and physical wellness.

"Yoga isn't really about looking pretty, it's not about how perfectly you can do the poses. It's about being here, taking the time for yourself, and taking the time with your community," said Maj. Brittany Fraser, who served as the event's volunteer instructor. "It's like the energy of the room completely changes when people really embrace that."

Jada Stevens felt the power of the supportive environment during the session. "When I mess up at home by myself, I just stop and don't try the move again," she explained. "But here, I saw people making mistakes and then trying again. That type of community was nice to see—it pushed me to keep going."

Stevens, who works at the Patch Barracks Community Bank, was encouraged to attend the session with her colleague, Sarah Puckett, by their supervisor.

Puckett observed that the session wasn't about being perfect, but rather about recognizing your own

limits and understanding what's okay for you. "That awareness of yourself really plays into being aware of when your mental health isn't where it should be," she said. "When you don't know that you're not doing all right, you can't reach out for resources."

For Michelle Fox, a licensed counselor at ASAP, this was a major reason for organizing the event. As someone who has experienced the stress relief that yoga can bring, she thought it would be helpful for the garrison community to feel the same benefits.

Within military communities, it can be tough to manage mental health on your own. The high demands—whether you're a service member, civilian employee, or family member—can lead to burnout or stress, which is why finding ways to cope, whether through reading, traveling, exercising, or something else, is so important. Having healthy ways to deal with stress doesn't just help you feel better; it can make a real difference in your mood and productivity.

That's something Fraser, an Army Civil Affairs officer, understands well. She began practicing yoga on the recommendation of friends after her first deployment to Afghanistan, which made her realize the need to develop healthy coping mechanisms for

stress. It's since become a pivotal tool for her to manage the demands of military life and maintain a sense of balance.

"It really changed how I thought about problems, and it gave me time to myself that I never really had," she said.

As the days get shorter and the temperatures drop, these coping strategies become even more crucial. Less sunlight means less vitamin D, and that can have a real impact on your mood. Many people find themselves struggling to stay on top of daily life during the winter months. That's why it's important to find ways to get more vitamin D—whether that's through your diet, supplements, or making the most of sunlight when you can. And remember, supporting friends and family is just as important. Something as simple as sending a text or grabbing a coffee with someone can brighten their day.

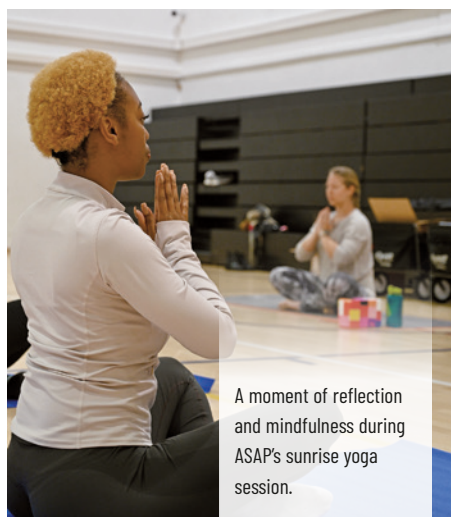
Along with staying connected, USAG Stuttgart offers plenty of resources for everyone in the community. ASAP's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers free, confidential, non-medical counseling for adults who aren't active duty. For those needing more focused help, the Substance Use Disorder Clinical Care (SUDCC) program provides one-on-one therapy with a psychologist. There are also Chaplain Services and Military & Family Life Counselors (MFLC) available. While reaching out for help can feel intimidating, it's important to remember there are multiple resources—and if one counselor isn't the right fit, you can always ask to meet with someone else. A full list of resources is available on the USAG Stuttgart mobile app.

As we transition from fall to winter, staying connected and looking out for one another is key. Whether it's inviting someone out for coffee or organizing a weekend activity, those small gestures can go a long way. For everyone in the military community, keeping that in mind as winter approaches can make all the difference.

Presley Chacon is a Stuttgart High School senior working with the USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs Office as part of DoDEA's Career Practicum program.

"It really changed how I thought about problems, and it gave me time to myself that I never really had."

Maj. Brittany Fraser.



A moment of reflection and mindfulness during ASAP's sunrise yoga session.



# ACS expert offers tips on settling in after an OCONUS Move

Compiled by Bardia Khajenouri  
USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

Moving overseas is an exciting adventure, but it comes with unique challenges. Stephanie Holets, USAG Stuttgart's ACS Relocation Readiness Program Manager, recently shared her firsthand experiences and expert advice on settling in after an OCONUS (Outside Continental United States) move on the Military OneSource podcast.

Here are a few highlights from her appearance, condensed for clarity and brevity:

**Q:** What are some of the first steps military families should take after arriving overseas?

**Holets:** One of the first things newcomers should focus on is getting connected right away. At ACS, we provide a variety of pre-arrival information, and when families land, we offer newcomers orientation and grocery store tours to help them adjust to their new surroundings. We help people understand cultural differences through language classes and cultural adaptation programs. We also have a lending closet where families can borrow kitchen items and other essentials as they wait for their household goods to arrive. It's really about making sure people feel supported from the moment they step off the plane.

**Q:** Culture shock is something many military families experience when they move overseas. How do you help them deal with it?

**Holets:** Culture shock is something we don't talk about enough. A lot of people expect a fairy tale—they imagine traveling all over Europe and having an adventure. But when they get here, they realize it takes time to settle in. Simple things like getting a driver's license or navigating the grocery store can feel overwhelming.

At ACS, we try to bridge that gap between expectation and reality. We offer tours and help explain how things work locally. It can take three to six months for people to feel comfortable, and that's okay. Staying connected with friends, neighbors, and services is important, and we're here to help families navigate those challenges.

**Q:** How do military families build connections within their communities after an overseas move?

**Holets:** Coming overseas is unique because the military community becomes your primary support network in a way that doesn't necessarily happen stateside; since most families don't speak the local language, the base is where they find their community. Some people who have been military spouses for years may never have really engaged with the military community back in the U.S., but when they move overseas, everyone's on an even playing field because nobody knows anybody.

I've found that people here tend to be much more open to making friends quickly, which is really positive. We have programs at ACS for newcomers (including

families, new parents, and foreign-born spouses) that provide opportunities for making those connections, but people also naturally find each other through informal channels.

**Q:** How does ACS support military spouses in finding employment after an overseas move?

**Holets:** Spouse employment is a huge challenge, especially overseas, but there have been some really positive changes. For example, there's a new memorandum that allows military spouses in government roles to telework from overseas if their job permits it, and I've already met a few. That's huge for a lot of spouses who previously couldn't continue their careers while stationed abroad.

At ACS, we also run the Employment Readiness Program, which helps spouses find job opportunities, whether that's on base or through home-based businesses (HBBs). We make sure spouses are aware of the requirements to run an HBB legally while overseas, whether you're doing photography, selling baked goods, or offering other services. The program really helps military spouses navigate those challenges.

Hear the full interview on the Sept. 16 edition of the Military OneSource Podcast, available on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or wherever you get your podcasts. You can find ACS in Bldg. 2949, Panzer Kaserne, or at [stuttgart.armymwr.com/programs/acs](http://stuttgart.armymwr.com/programs/acs).



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# MWR events to be excited about this fall & winter

By Nano Betts

USAG Stuttgart Family and MWR



Get excited for fall and embrace the spirit of the holiday season as Family and MWR brings you another lineup of exhilarating events. Prepare to fill up your calendar with fun community-wide happenings that will bring loads of joy and guarantee you and your family will say, "I'm glad I live here!"

## OUTDOOR RECREATION SURVIVAL COURSES

Craving thrill and adventure this winter, but need some gear? Care to learn new skills that will last you a lifetime? Our Outdoor Recreation is your go-to for all of the above and more. Here are ODR seasonal highlights:



Courtesy photos

## START OF THE SKI RENTAL SEASON:

MWR Outdoor Recreation offers a full set of ski and snowboard rentals to lead you into snow-capped adventures. Enjoy the thrill of snowy slopes in Europe while using their equipment. Come into ODR and rent a ski or snowboard full set for the entire season from Oct. 7, 2024 - Apr. 30, 2025. Ski

equipment includes skis, boots, poles, and helmet, while snowboard equipment includes board, boots, bindings, and helmet. You can take advantage of seasonal or short-term rental packages.

→ **Schedule an appointment for your fitting to come into Outdoor Recreation at Kelley Barracks today!**

## KIDS' SURVIVAL COURSE:

Are you looking for an exciting and educational adventure for your child? Then this course is the perfect opportunity to learn essential life skills while having fun! There are 2 classes available for children ages 6-14 on Oct. 26, either from 9 a.m. - 1 p.m. or 2 - 6 p.m.

- **Where:** Garden of Eden, Panzer Range Complex.
- **Cost:** \$125 per child.
- **Call or stop by Outdoor Recreation to register for this course by Oct. 19.**

## SURVIVAL COURSE FOR ADULTS (OVER-NIGHT OPTIONAL):

This course offers you the chance to master essential outdoor skills in a hands-on environment. You'll learn: shelter building, water purification, fire starting, first aid, and signaling for rescue. Each participant will receive a survival bag filled with essential gear to use during the course and keep afterward. Choose between a one-day or overnight experience.

- **Dates:** Nov. 2-3 or Nov. 16-17.
- **Where:** Panzer LTA Grounds.
- **Cost:** \$150 per person (one-day), \$225 per person (overnight).
- **Register by Oct. 26 or Nov. 9.**

## 3-DAY ADVANCED SURVIVAL COURSE:

Our 3-day intensive course, held in the breathtaking forests of Waldenbuch, is designed to equip you with the knowledge and confidence to thrive in the wilderness. Course highlights: navigation, shelter building, fire starting, water purification, First Aid, wildlife knowledge.

- **Dates:** Nov. 8-10.
- **Location:** Camping in Waldenbuch.
- **Cost:** €650 per person. Minimum Age: 18 years.
- **Registration:** Stop by, call, or email ODR to register.
- **Where:** Bay 5, Building 3320, Kelley Barracks.
- **Contact:** CIV 09641-70-596-4291.

## NEW SEASON AT STUTTGART THEATRE CENTER

This is your friendly reminder that Kelley Barracks is home to a phenomenal theatre that has produced many award-winning performances through the years. Don't miss the 2024-2025 season that brings a number of exhilarating productions to the stage. Charlotte's Web offered a strong start in October, and with two more coming up soon:

### 'THE WOMAN IN BLACK':

Prepare to be chilled to the bone! Follow a lawyer haunted by a terrifying encounter with the infamous Woman in Black, a spectral figure said to bring doom. To conquer his fear, he hires an actor to relive that fateful night. Tickets go on sale Oct. 15. Performances start Oct. 25 and end Nov. 3, with a special Halloween performance on Oct. 31.

### 'ROALD DAHL'S MATILDA THE MUSICAL':

Inspired by the twisted genius of Roald Dahl, this Tony Award-winning masterpiece from the Royal Shakespeare Company revels in the anarchy of childhood, the power of imagination and the inspiring story of a girl who dreams of a better life.

- **Performances:** Dec. 6, 7, 13, 14, 20 & 21 at 7:30 pm; Dec. 8, 15 & 22 at 3 p.m. Tickets go on sale Nov. 12.
- **Where:** Building 3320, Kelley Barracks.
- **Contact:** CIV 0711-729-3055.

## SPORTS & FITNESS EVENTS THE GREAT PUMPKIN RUN:





Prepare for a spooktacular 5K fun run that promises to be a hauntingly good time for all participants. The loop goes through the beautiful woods behind Patch Barracks and begins and ends in front of the Patch Fitness Center. Don't forget to don your best Halloween costume for a chance to win a thrilling prize! As an added treat, registrants will receive a medal and a complimentary event t-shirt (only while supplies last), making it a must-have addition to your Halloween wardrobe.

➔ **Dates:** The Great Pumpkin Run will take place at 9 a.m. on Oct. 26

➔ **Where:** Patch Barracks.

➔ **Cost:** The cost is \$20 for early bird registration (Oct. 7-23) and \$25 for same-day registration on Oct. 26.

### ➔ THE UGLY SWEATER RUN:

Show off your ugliest sweater during this 5k fun run! Join us for the Holiday themed 5K run through Patch Barracks. Get your festive running gear ready as we start and finish in front of the Patch Fitness Center. Don't forget to dress tacky to win a prize for the ugliest sweater! The first 100 participants will receive a free shirt (assorted sizes, only while supplies last).

➔ **Dates:** The Ugly Sweater Run will begin at 9 a.m. on Dec. 7.

➔ **Cost:** Pre-registration costs \$20 (Nov. 4-Dec. 4), and same-day registration on Dec. 7 is \$25.

➔ **Register at any Fitness Center or via Webtrac.**

➔ **Contact:** CIV 09641-70-596-7136.

### FROSTY FEST

Embrace the winter wonderland and join us for a jolly jamboree at Frosty Fest on Dec. 6, starting at 3 p.m. Get ready for a whimsical winter celebration that will sprinkle your day with holiday magic and joy! Don your coziest mittens and scarves, as we invite you to revel in the enchanting spirit of the season. Immerse yourself in the twinkling lights and merriment while sipping on steaming cups of Gluhwein and Kinderpunch – the perfect elixirs to warm your spirit and infuse your heart with that holiday glow. Expect live music, holiday treats & trinkets, Santa and friends, crafts and cookies, and lots of good cheer. Open to all authorized Family & MWR Patrons and escorted guests.

➔ **Where:** Panzer Kaserne, Galaxy Bowling Parking Lot next to Bldg. 2998.

➔ **Contact:** CIV 09641-70-596-3516.



### SEASONAL SPECIALS AT GALAXY BOWLING & ENTERTAINMENT CENTER

As always, Galaxy Bowling and Entertainment Center is your go-to destination for all things fun and with their seasonal specials everyone is guaranteed an extra dose of excitement and joy this holiday season. Here is what to look forward to in the coming months:

#### HALLOWEEN SPOOK-TACULAR:

Calling all Ghouls & Ghosts! To make the Halloween season even more fun, The Galaxy Bowling & Entertainment Center is hosting a Halloween party for a hauntingly good time with family and friends! Expect amazing activities like Scavenger Hunt, Candy & Door prizes and Halloween Trivia! As always, ShaWINGz will be serving delicious bites and Prost on Post will offer Spook-tacular drink specials. And of course, no visit to GBEC can be complete without a game or two!

➔ **Enjoy the bowling special of the day:** \$6 Cosmic Bowling, which includes shoe rental and 2 games per person.

➔ **Dates:** 4-9 p.m., Oct. 31.

#### STRIKE MIDNIGHT AT THE GBEC:

Welcome in 2025 with bowling, live DJ, Bowling Bingo, games, prizes, giveaways, and party favors. Add special drinks to the mix (Midnight Magic Martini, anyone?), and this celebration is sure to be one to remember! ShaWINGz will be serving your favorite tasty dishes. Round out the evening by toasting the new year with complimentary champagne or sparkling cider. The event will run from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m. Early bird pricing is \$45 for adults, \$25 for kids, and \$130 for a family special. On the night of the event, prices will increase to \$50 for adults, \$30 for kids, and \$150 for the family special. Grab your tickets from Dec. 8-28 to secure a bowling lane for the evening! Pre-sales are available from Dec. 1-26 and at the door the night of the event. No refunds will be available on pre-sales.

➔ **Where:** Bldg. 2998, Panzer Kaserne.

➔ **Contact:** CIV 07031-15-2719.

#### MWR TOURS SPRING 2025 TRIPS

For those of us who prefer to plan our travels well in advance, MWR Tours is offering early bird specials for a few trips for spring 2025.

##### AMSTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

➔ **Dates:** April 11-13, 2025

Visit the most famous flower parade of the Netherlands as well as the tulip gardens of Keukenhof. Book by Nov. 8 to save \$150!

##### MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND IN DUBROVNIK, CROATIA

➔ **Dates:** May 23 - 26, 2025

Book a trip to the "Pearl of the Adriatic." Dubrovnik, a city in southern Croatia fronting the Adriatic Sea, is one of the best-preserved medieval cities in the world, complete with large, intact outer walls. Book by Jan. 10 and save \$200!

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For full details, pricing and itineraries of these trips, stop by or call MWR Tours.

➔ **Where:** Panzer Kaserne, Bldg. 2915, Room 312B.

➔ **Contact:** CIV 09641-70-596-2104

#### MWR TOURS CHRISTMAS MARKET TRIPS

You don't need us to tell you that you live in the land of Christmas Markets. Visit some of the best Christmas markets hassle free by booking one (or better yet, all!) of the upcoming MWR Tours trips. Destinations include Vienna, Budapest, Zurich, and even Prague in early January. Whether you're looking for a quick local trip to Esslingen or you're ready to explore the magic of Strasbourg and Colmar, we have you covered. Contact MWR Tours over the phone, in person, or via Webtrac to inquire about registration dates and prices.

➔ **Contact:** CIV 09641-70-596-2104

.....  
For more details about USAG Stuttgart Family and MWR events and programs, please visit [stuttgart.armymwr.com](http://stuttgart.armymwr.com)



# Past experience, present opportunity, future value: **TAP Center has it all**



By Michael C. Roach

USAG Stuttgart Directorate of Human Resources (DHR)

USAG Stuttgart Directorate of Human Resources (DHR)

The Army ‘keeps rolling along,’ but everyone’s time in uniform ends. Few know this better than USAG Stuttgart Transition Services Manager James Hill – that’s why he’s here to help.

Hill arrived in Stuttgart to lead the garrison’s Transition Assistance Program (TAP) this summer, bringing with him a wealth of experience in administration and service. Arguably as important, he has an intimate knowledge of what it feels like to struggle after transitioning out of the military. It was a struggle he was able to endure thanks to the knowledge he gained during his transition, he said.

Once called the Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP), the Army rebranded and invested considerably into the Soldier for Life-Transition Assistance Program in the mid-2010s. Now known simply as TAP, the program is a staple in every Soldier’s career, ensuring that they have access and awareness of programs that are tailor-made to help them find success.

“I actually went through ACAP and then decided to stay in,” Hill said. “By the time I was ready to get out, it was called Soldier For Life. Then, through a series of events, I ended up homeless. But I used the information I was given in SFL TAP to take advantage of VA benefits. The VA saved my life.”

Hill served in the Army as a 42A (Human Resources Specialist) before completing his active duty service in 2017 at Camp Zama, Japan. From there, he moved to the western Pacific island of Palau, where he had planned to run a business, doing so for three months before a slump in tourism made that impossible. He then moved to Guam, where he was unhoused.

Amid his financial struggles, Hill was able to rely on two critical programs—VA disability and the GI Bill—that he had learned about during his time in TAP, ultimately putting them to use just when he needed them most.

“I didn’t have a paystub, [so I] couldn’t get a place. I was moving from Airbnb to Airbnb, going through my life savings,” Hill said. “I was almost out of money, but VA disability kicked in just in time, with backpay. I was finally able to get a place because of the GI bill and the housing money counting as income.”

Over the next two years, he would attend college online, earning associate and bachelor’s degrees in human resources. He then took a job as a government contractor before landing a federal position in Hawaii.

“If you think about it, we are amazingly lucky to have a Transition Services Manager that has struggled and succeeded like that,” said USAG Stuttgart Human Resources Director Dennis Heaney, whose directorate includes TAP. “He has the

James Hill stands at the front of the TAP Center hallway in Bldg. 2915. Hill has turned its bulletin boards into a wealth of information about employment opportunities, transition information, and training dates.

Photos by Bardia Khajenoori

education and the work experience, he knows the regulations. While that’s important, what he really has is the ability to lead that program from a place of sympathy and understanding. To our transitioning service members, that is invaluable.”

Hill doesn’t mince words when connecting his past experiences with his current role. For him, embracing this job means helping people facing the same challenges that he did. This experience has led him to strongly advise that transitioning service members start planning early.

“I’ve found myself in an extraordinary position, coming into a program that had solid infrastructure and being able to inject my personal passion, history and enthusiasm,” he said. His enthusiasm for the program is clear as he emphasizes its many merits.

Service members are encouraged to begin enrollment in TAP within 18 months of separation (24 months for retirees). Reservists who are at USAG Stuttgart but are not demobilizing back to their unit need to come by the TAP Center as soon as they arrive on station, according to Hill.

For that matter, the USAG Stuttgart TAP Center is open to all branches of service. While each branch has its own variation of TAP, the programs incorporate the same career readiness standards. Given the joint service community at USAG Stuttgart, Hill encourages everyone to come by regardless of their uniform pattern, and chances to do so are bountiful.

“We have a lot of opportunities and community engagements planned,” Hill said. “We are partnered with ACS on a community job fair Oct. 23. On April 9, we are doing a Hiring Our Heroes event. Things like the [Army] Career Skills Program are difficult, geographically, but I am hopeful that we have a lot of great partners here at USAG Stuttgart that are going to help our transitioning folks gain needed experiences and skills.”

The USAG Stuttgart TAP Center is located on the fourth floor of Building 2915 on Panzer Kaserne. For more information, visit the USAG Stuttgart Mobile App or <https://home.army.mil/stuttgart/tap>



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# Panthers on the prowl: SHS fall sports teams tackle new season

By Mackenzie Welsh

Stuttgart High School Career Practicum Student

Stuttgart High School (SHS) is well known for its consistent domination in sports across DoDEA Europe, with many of its teams winning European Championships several years in a row. Playing sports in a military community presents its challenges, however, as athletes are always relocating and graduating, which can lead to shifts in talent and team dynamics from year to year. Let's see how the Panthers are stacking up at the start of the new school year with new teams and fresh talents.

## FOOTBALL

Having gone undefeated for three years and losing only a single game last season,



The Panthers defensive line attempts to stop Kaiserslautern from scoring. Photo by Naomi Givens

the football team is a cornerstone of Stuttgart's athletic prowess. This year's season did not get off to an auspicious start, with the team losing 30-15 to their biggest rival, Ramstein. They barely eked out a win in their second game, going 14-12 against Wiesbaden, but put in some hard work and pulled out a 21-12 win the following week against Lakenheath. However, they then lost to Kaiserslautern 14-3, which dropped the team from a second-place tie with Ramstein into third. It has been a year of major turnover for the Panthers, who lost all but 10 of their varsity players after last season. According to senior and captain Phillip Myrice, this has resulted in a smaller team—about half the size of last year's roster—but he believes that, with hard work, they can still earn their fourth consecutive championship. Overall, the team seems to be gaining momentum and working hard, which could help them retain their reputation as DoDEA's powerhouse. As of press time, the Panthers still have a chance to secure their place in the championship if they defeat the fourth-place team in the upcoming playoff game.

## CROSS-COUNTRY

The SHS cross-country teams have dominated the field for years, and this year appears to be no exception. Both the boys' and girls' teams have won all four races they have competed in so far. After losing four of the boys' top seven scorers last year, it was uncertain whether Stuttgart would make a comeback, but new faces and the hard training of returning athletes have led to seven boys running under 18 minutes for the 5K, compared to only two boys who achieved that time the previous year. On the girls' side, the returning European champions lost



The girls cross country team prepares to race their home course and see how they stack up.

Photo by Naomi Givens

only two of their top runners but added several new faces, which has resulted in an even stronger team. Both teams are aiming to win Euros this year, with the girls looking for their fourth consecutive championship, while the boys attempt

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to reclaim their title from Ramstein, who took home the gold last year. While it may not seem like it, cross-country is very much a team sport, and according to captain Mary Shafer, as long as the team continues working hard, they will win the championship.

## BOYS VOLLEYBALL

Boys' volleyball is the newest sport at SHS, and while it is not yet an official DoDEA sport, the team has been competing against other DoDEA teams and is even seeking an exception to policy in order to compete at Euros. According to captain Tristan Miletich, if the team is able to compete at Euros, they will have a serious shot at winning. The team was created by Miletich and Jackson Meier after they discovered that the school did not have a boys' volleyball team. Miletich transferred from Vicenza, where he was one of the star players. The team has both an A and B squad, made up predominantly of athletes who play other sports throughout the year, though many of them have prior experience in volleyball. The team has played well this season, offsetting a few losses with several wins. While they are still getting a feel for the game, they have performed remarkably well.

## GIRLS VOLLEYBALL

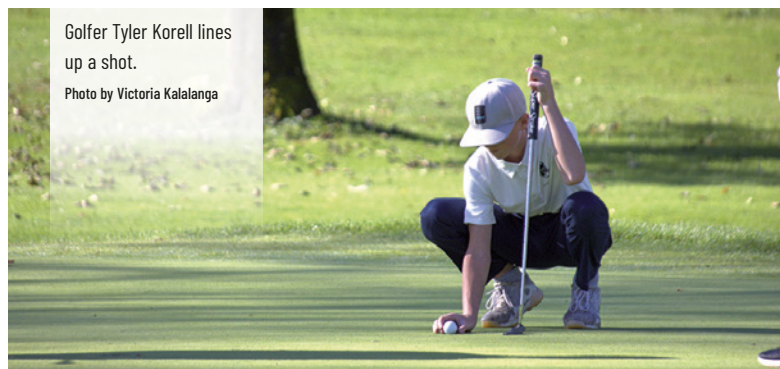
The girls' volleyball team continues Stuttgart's dominance in sports, as they remain undefeated so far this season. They started strong, winning 3-2 against Wiesbaden in their first set of matches. The following weekend, they played both Lakenheath and Ramstein, winning 3-0 against Lakenheath in a complete shutout and 3-2 against Ramstein. They kept the momentum going by defeating Hohenfels and Black Forest the next weekend. After placing fourth last year, the team is aiming for a win at Euros. One of the key elements of volleyball is strong team dynamics, and according to captain Ruthie Thompson, the team has quickly found that essential dynamic they were ready to build on this season. They returned this year with only about half of their players from previous seasons after losing many seniors and several players who moved. However, this hasn't slowed them down; they've rebuilt with a strong team, adding a large influx of freshmen who have already reached a high skill level. The team's unity, new players, and dominance so far this season spell a bright future for the volleyball program.

## GOLF

The golf team is hard at work this season, with several more players than last year. Since golf is an individual sport, team scores are not recorded, and players compete as individuals. The team has grown, with eight boys and four girls competing this season. DoDEA golf is scored based on the Stableford system, where the more points received, the better. For example, a par is worth two points, and a birdie is worth three. According to Clara Thompson, one of the players on the girls' team, everyone has been working hard and improving from last year. Clara has performed well in most of her matches, earning a second-place average on

Golfer Tyler Korell lines up a shot.

Photo by Victoria Kalalanga



the team, while Isabelle Spencer holds first place. Both have secured spots in the European Championship. On the boys' side, Tyler Korell appears to be the standout competitor, consistently scoring in the 30s and 40s in all his matches, which could indicate a strong chance of winning Euros.

## TENNIS

Tennis was another team that lost many players last year to graduation and PCS moves; however, they received several new members, including a brother-sister duo who previously played in Okinawa. The loss of so many players was a big blow, but the team bounced back, gaining 10 new players this year, resulting in a sizable roster. The girls' team started out strong this season, defeating both Lakenheath and Vilseck and eking out a win against Wiesbaden last weekend. On the boys' side, they won against Lakenheath in their first competition but lost to Vilseck and Wiesbaden in the following weekends. Samantha Doughty, a team captain, believes the team can squeeze out a second-place finish at Euros as they face off against some tough competition. She says that everyone has been working hard, and the team's talent this year is stronger than last year. With so many new players and fresh talent, they may be able to bring home the gold.

Mackenzie Welsh is a Stuttgart High School senior working with the USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs Office as part of DoDEA's Career Practicum program. She is a member of the girls' cross-country team.

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# Employee Spotlight

Interviews and Photos by Bardia Khajenoori

USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

## Pfc. Josiah Edness

Religious Affairs Specialist (56M), Religious Support Office (RSO)

### How long have you been in the Army, and in this role?

I've been in the Army for 10 months total, and in Stuttgart as a Religious Affairs Specialist for four months now. This is actually my first duty station.

### What are some of your responsibilities? What does a typical day look like for you?

On the administrative side, I'm the funds technician for the RSO, so I manage all different sorts of finances – whether that would be working with the chapels and making sure we have enough funding to provide for any congregational needs, managing the offerings, or organizing funds for retreats or special programs.

I usually work from Sunday through Thursday. My main job is being the funds technician, but I'm also here to help out wherever I'm needed. So a typical day can include helping out with chapel services, cleaning the chapel, or supporting events like picnic mass, Club Beyond for high schoolers, or Vacation Bible School, to make sure everything runs smoothly.

### How do you feel your work impacts the community?

I feel like my work helps bring a sense of comfort and family to people who are far from home. A lot of us are away from our families and friends, and it's hard sometimes. But we try to create a loving atmosphere. Whether it's through a care package, inviting



them to something, or just offering support, it helps them feel like they're not alone. I know when I came here, I was scared, coming to a country I'd never seen to do something I'd never done before, but now I feel like I've found a new family. I hope my work helps others feel that way, too.

### What do you find most rewarding about your job?

For me, one of the most rewarding things about my job is the opportunity to practice my faith while also making a positive difference in people's lives. I grew up in a household where religion was very important, so this role lets me do work that's meaningful and aligned with my values.

I also really enjoy the chance to interact with and support such a diverse community. And as someone who loves to travel and explore, being able to do a job I love in a different country is pretty exciting too.

### What kind of skills do you think are most essential to doing well in your job?

I think being organized is key; you don't get many chances to mess up when it comes to finances, so keeping everything in order is important. I was lucky to take over from someone who was really good at that. But for the Religious Support job in general, I'd say being a people person matters the most. You've got to be able to share joy and connect with others, because sometimes just a smile or a kind word can really help someone who's going through a tough time.

### How would you summarize your personality in one sentence?

I'd say I'm an eager go-getter; once I set my mind to something, I won't stop until it's done the way it should be—even if that means staying late or going the extra mile, as long as it makes a difference for someone.

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## Sandra Smith

Deputy Chief, Housing Division, Directorate of Public Works

### How long have you been in this role, and with the garrison?

I started working at the garrison in 2011 as a contractor for housing referral services – that's when I discovered my love for housing. I transitioned to a local national position in 2016.

### What does a typical day look like for you?

My typical day starts with doing rounds to check in with my team, seeing if there are any issues, and making sure each department has the support it needs. Sometimes, if people are sick or on leave, we have to move around and cover for each other. I also handle a lot of emails and attend various meetings. But my top priority is always the customer - making sure we can help them and meet their housing needs as best we can.

### What do you find most rewarding about your job?

The most rewarding part of my job is when I'm able to find a home for a family and see their happiness. It's really fulfilling to help provide a home, especially for families with children. I can see the excitement when the kids are seeing their rooms for



the first time and look forward to making new friends. Even though it can be challenging at times to align what the customer wants with what we can offer, it's so rewarding when I'm able to work with them and get them settled in a home.

### Do you have any particularly memorable customer service experiences?

We had a service member who was given a certificate of non-availability and authorized to move off-post because we had absolutely nothing open at the time. Many people would love to have this option, but he was very unhappy because he thought it would be a lot easier on his children and pregnant wife if they could live on post. I told him I would look into homes

that might be available soon, made some phone calls, and sure enough, found one about to be vacated, with no waiting list. I was able to work with the contractor to prioritize that apartment for turnaround, and we got them moved in within a week. He was so grateful and left a very nice comment, appreciating that we went the extra mile to understand his situation and help him get the on-post housing he wanted for his family. Moments like that are really fulfilling and make me feel good about the work we do.

### What kind of skills do you think are most essential to doing well in your job?

I believe the most essential skills are empathy, being a good listener, and having the willingness to go above and beyond for your customers, even if it means thinking outside the box at times to try to meet their needs and make them happy. We may not always be able to provide the exact thing the customer wants, because we're restricted by regulations and actual availability, but it's important to hear them out and work with them to see what we can offer that's within our power to provide.

### How would you summarize your personality in one sentence?

I'm outgoing, customer-oriented, and always willing to help.



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# WINTER SAFETY

## starts with preparation

By Rachael L. Long  
USAG Stuttgart Safety Manager

The 2024-2025 fall-winter season is upon us and as the weather cools a bit, people will be ready to get out and enjoy outdoor activities. Fall and winter bring unique safety hazards. Some hazards — like driving — can vary based on location and severity. Other hazards arise from activities that occur at certain times of the year and can bring hazards that we all should take care to avoid.

### Fests and Christmas Markets

Enjoy seasonal events, but plan ahead for safety. Always have a transportation plan — whether it's a designated driver, train, or bus. Pace yourself, stay hydrated, and drink alcohol responsibly. Travel with a buddy and establish meeting points in case you get separated. Keep emergency numbers in mind: 110 for police and 112 for fire or medical emergencies. Don't forget to register with ALERT!, the AtHoc Mass Notification Warning System, required for all personnel stationed at an Army post. You can receive alerts on personal devices and via email.

### Winter Driving

- **Winter Tires:** Germany requires the use

of winter tires in icy or snowy conditions. Remember “von O bis O” (‘from O to O,’ meaning October to Easter) as a rule of thumb for when to have the right tires on your vehicle. A change in the law that took effect this fall means that tires marked only with “M+S” (‘mud and snow’) are no longer considered winter tires. Winter tires must now have the Alpine symbol (a snowflake inside a mountain), certifying that they meet winter traction performance standards. This law applies to motorbikes, trucks, and buses. Tires should have a tread depth of at least 1.6 mm, but it's safer to have 4 mm. To check, place a €2 coin in the tread — if the silver edge is visible, it's time for new tires. For government vehicle operation, winter driving training must be completed in October and November, and records should be submitted to the Driver's License Testing Office.

- **Emergency Supplies:** Be prepared! A well-stocked emergency kit could save you from a cold and miserable experience if your car breaks down or slides off the road due to snow and ice. Your kit should include items for visibility, warmth, basic repairs, emergency signaling, and personal safety, such as a snow brush, flashlight, blanket, jumper cables, hazard triangle, reflective

vest, first aid kit, windshield washer fluid, and snow chains.

- **Motorcycles:** If riding this autumn, be sure you're prepared for the ride! Wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Beware of poor visibility — wear bright colors and reflective gear. Watch for more active wildlife. Beware of traction surprises. Frost and leaves can be as slick as ice.
- **Driver Reminders:** Drivers should slow down and give themselves extra time to react to potential hazards. Stay focused, keep phones out of reach, and watch for pedestrians and cyclists. Always stop at crosswalks and be extra vigilant around parked vehicles where pedestrians may step out unexpectedly. If you have a near miss, take a minute to debrief — why did you miss seeing that person? What was the situation? Driving distracted? How can you prevent it happening again?

### Changing the Clocks/“Fall Back.”

Daylight Saving Time (DST) in Europe ends Oct. 27. This is a good reminder to test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors, clear out old medications, and prepare winter emergency kits. The time change also disrupts sleep patterns, which can increase workplace accidents and mistakes.

**Pedestrian Safety:** Pedestrians should be extra cautious during fall and winter when it's darker. Wear light-colored or reflective clothing and carry a flashlight. Stay alert, avoid distractions like phones, and don't use earbuds around roadways. Always make eye contact with drivers before crossing and never assume you have the right of way.

**Bicycle Safety:** Shorter days mean more commuting in the dark. Ensure your bicycle is roadworthy, with a white front light, a red rear light, and reflectors on tires and pedals. Bikes should also have two functioning brakes. Wear light-colored or reflective clothing, always use a helmet, and follow both on-post and German traffic regulations when riding.

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# Robinson Barracks Elementary recognized as a 2024 National Blue Ribbon School

By Jessica Tackaberry  
DoDEA Europe

The U.S. Department of Education has recognized Robinson Barracks Elementary School, a DoDEA Europe school in Stuttgart, Germany, as one of the prestigious National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2024. This esteemed honor is awarded to schools that demonstrate exceptional academic performance or significant progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups.

Robinson Barracks Elementary, selected as an Exemplary High Performing School, joins two other DoDEA schools honored with Blue Ribbon status this year: West Point Elementary School at the United States Military Academy and Alconbury Elementary School in the United Kingdom. The Blue-Ribbon Award highlights the school's dedication to fostering a safe and engaging environment where students can excel.

"The recognition of Robinson Barracks Elementary

as a National Blue Ribbon School showcases the commitment, hard work, and collaboration of our entire school community," said Dr. Lisa Bell, RBES principal. "This achievement reflects our dedication to academic excellence and ensuring each student has the opportunity to thrive."

DoDEA Europe East District Superintendent Elizabeth Fales echoed these sentiments: "Robinson Barracks Elementary has consistently demonstrated a standard of excellence beyond academic performance. This award highlights our educators, students, and families' collective efforts to create a nurturing and high-achieving learning environment. We are incredibly proud of this recognition."

The National Blue-Ribbon Schools Program is one of the longest-running recognition programs by the U.S. Department of Education. It celebrates schools that set and meet high academic standards. In 2024, 356 schools nationwide were honored, inspiring educational excellence. Schools are recognized in one of two categories: Exemplary High Performing Schools, ranking among their state's highest performers, and Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing Schools, acknowledged for their success in closing achievement gaps among student groups.

For more information, visit <https://www.dodea.edu/education/school-awards/national-blue-ribbon-schools>



Graphic by DoDEA Europe

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# Allied Service Members forge friendships at Soldiers' Fest



German Bundeswehr Soldiers and U.S. Soldiers making new connections at the Soldiers' Fest.



Sgt. Amber Cobena, of AFN Stuttgart, shows off patches exchanged during festivities.

Story & photos by **Balmina Sehra**  
USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

More than 3,000 Soldiers marched into the Fürstenberg beer tent at the Cannstatter Wasen on Sept. 30 to attend the annual Soldaten Wasen (Soldiers' Fest). Despite their diverse backgrounds, they all shared a common purpose on this day: to celebrate camaraderie in this tradition dating back to 1975.

Amid the clinking of glasses and German live music, a sense of unity is created amongst service members from the United States, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland, reminding everyone of the bonds that tie together those who serve.

"I think any opportunity we have as a community to build our partnership with our German community is always a win for us," said USAG Stuttgart Command Sgt. Maj. Denice Malave, who tapped the keg to officially declare the fest open.

Colloquially known as the "NATO beer maneuver," the fest is celebrated in downtown Stuttgart during the renowned Volksfest each fall.

"Our Soldiers have the opportunity to interact with the Bundeswehr, enabling them to share and learn about history as they exchange patches and learn the significance of each. It shows how we all come together for one purpose, to serve and protect," said Malave.

U.S. Soldiers, aware of the uniqueness of this experience, travel from various parts of Germany to participate.

"We've had Soldiers join us from Baumholder and Grafenwoehr and I believe that it shows how special this event is for them, if they are willing to travel from so far," said Malave.

The event's significance and the importance of fostering new friendships among the troops are also highly valued by members of the Bundeswehr.

"The Soldiers' Fest for the Bundeswehr and armed forces of friendly nations is a great opportunity to exchange ideas with our allies from the U.S. and other partner nations," said Lt. Col. Stephan. "Whether in action or the festival tent - the encounters and exchanges between the Soldiers are important."

Symbolizing the partnership with Germany over the last few decades, it's "a great opportunity to get together with the Bundeswehr and share drinks and stories and finding key similarities between our militaries," said Capt. Andrew Horn, commander of the garrison Headquarters and Headquarters Company.

Creating new relationships and strengthening existing ones is important for practical reasons as well.

"The ability to meet new officers and enlisted leaders in the community means we can do joint training in the future," said Horn.

Soldiers' Fest brings many opportunities and future relationships among the different nations: "My favorite part is to watch everyone talk and create friendships with the German community," said Malave.

Per Bundeswehr policy, German soldiers are identified only by rank and first name.

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Photo by Sabine Schaaf/Shutterstock.com

## Visitors driving your car? Know the customs rules

By Kai Vollmer

U.S. Army Customs Agency – Europe

One advantage of being stationed in Germany is that friends and family can visit you and travel around Europe. However, if they plan to drive your USAREUR-AF plated vehicle, customs approval may be required first.

Approval is not necessary if a member of your household with a USAREUR-AF driver's license is present in the vehicle while your guest drives.

To get an Exception to Policy (AEA Form 550-175D) for your guest to allow them to drive without a licensed household member present, simply visit the U.S. Forces Customs office at Bldg. 2913, Panzer Kaserne, where staff will assist you with the application.

If you would like to have the paperwork ready before your relatives or friends arrive, you should bring along your vehicle registration and legible copies of their passports, stateside driver's licenses and either an official German translation of their licenses or an International Driving Permit (IDP).

In the United States, International Driving Permits are issued exclusively by the American Automobile Association (AAA) and come as a grey (5.8 x 4.1") paper booklet. IDPs issued by other providers, especially online versions, are not genuine and are considered invalid.

For visitors from countries other than the USA, please ask your local customs office if an International Driving Permit or translation is required. Also, please make sure that your automobile

insurance covers your guests.

It is also important to note that your guests cannot be residents of Germany (or plan to establish residency in Germany), and must be 18 years or older.

For visiting dependents, the USACA-E will issue AEA Form 190-1APQ for up to 90 days.

Your guests can use this exception to policy to drive a USAREUR-AF registered vehicle in Germany for up to 90 days within a six-month period. The 90-day period begins on the day the visitor arrives in Germany or any other country of the European Union. The document must remain in the car when your guests use your vehicle independently, along with their passports, the vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and their International Driving Permits (or official translations of their licenses).

Driving in Germany is a tax-free privilege for U.S. Forces personnel and their family members, which is why the customs authorization is required for guests. This exception to policy does not allow your guests to buy gas at AAFES/ESSO gas stations or use your AAFES fuel ration card. Likewise, friends or family visiting Germany who rent a car may not use AAFES gas stations or fuel ration cards.

With a little planning, your guests can enjoy exploring Europe by car.

For more information or assistance, contact your local US Forces Customs office (information in the USAG Stuttgart Mobile App) or visit the customs website (<https://www.europeafrica.army.mil/customs/>) for details on procedures and office locations.

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# Creating memories, sharing traditions

By Angelika Aguilar  
(as told to Bardia Khajenoori)

USAG Stuttgart Public Affairs

Thanksgiving was never really on my radar growing up in Germany, but after a few decades working for the U.S. Army, I've come to appreciate it. I first learned about it through my coworkers long before I met my American husband, Juan. Even though we Germans have a similar holiday, Erntedankfest, it's more about giving thanks for the harvest and doesn't really carry the same meaning.

Two years ago, Juan and I were planning to visit Pullman City, a Western-styled theme park about four hours' drive away in Bavaria, with a few of my family members during the summer. We found



Juan and Karl-Heinz prepare to carve the turkey.

a reasonably-priced guesthouse nearby, not expecting much more than a place to sleep after enjoying the shows and atmosphere at the park. But when we met Karl-Heinz and Sylvia, the owners of the guesthouse, it was like meeting old friends. They spoke excellent English, which made it easy for

Juan to connect with them; Karl-Heinz and Juan particularly bonded over their shared experience as former police officers. It was our first time there, but we clicked as a group right away.

After spending two weekends there during the summer, and after Karl-Heinz mentioned the German/American Christmas market at Pullman starting in November, we thought about spending four days and celebrating Thanksgiving together. Karl-Heinz, who is an amazing cook, loved the idea, and so did Sylvia, who had spent time in the U.S. as an exchange student and missed some of the traditions. Before we knew it, we were organizing a big meal with turkey – on Saturday instead of Thursday, since everyone else had to work during the week – and started to plan dishes. Juan made the turkey and Spanish rice, and Karl-Heinz made Bavarian potato salad, which ended up going surprisingly well with the turkey.

Karl-Heinz decorated the room with American and Bavarian flags, and even a Puerto Rican flag for Juan. Their whole family joined us, including their sons, daughters-in-law, and even a few of their friends, for a first taste of Thanksgiving. My mother and her friend were there as well, making it feel even more like home, especially for Juan, who couldn't be with his own family that year.

What started as a spontaneous celebration with new friends ended up being something we wanted to repeat. Last year, we invited a single soldier I often



For our Thanksgiving visit, Karl-Heinz and Sylvia took no other guests to ensure an intimate, festive atmosphere.

Photos courtesy Angelika Aguilar

work with; like Juan, he was spending the holiday far from home. He fit right in and we enjoyed another Thanksgiving together once again, complete with karaoke and American football played with our 'host family.'

The whole experience has reminded me of what Thanksgiving is truly about – gratitude for friendship, loved ones, and the family we create wherever we are. Karl-Heinz told us they plan to make Thanksgiving a tradition in their home, whether we can make it or not. That gives you some idea of how meaningful these celebrations have been for all of us.

For anyone who finds themselves far from home during the holidays, I encourage you to stay open to new connections. Whether it's joining a Thanksgiving meal with Better Opportunities for Single Servicemembers (BOSS), chapel communities, or the USO, or simply building friendships where you are, you might be surprised to find family in unexpected places. Sometimes the most beautiful traditions grow from the most spontaneous moments, and you realize that home is less about where you are and more about who you share it with.

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Cora and Victoria

"My team – I like the exchange of thoughts and ideas, and we're able to accomplish quite a bit."

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