Soldier Systems Center

SPOTLIGHT

Issue 26 *November 2026*



A Final Word



Transitioning our installation communications – The final issue of the “Spotlight”

To the Outstanding Community of Natick Soldier Systems Center,

For the past two and a half years, the U.S. Army Garrison Natick Public Affairs Office (PAO) team has dedicated itself to producing the “Spotlight”. Through its pages, we have celebrated the incredible work being done across our entire installation, highlighting the unique contributions of all tenant organizations that call Natick Soldier Systems Center (NSSC) home. We have shared inspiring human-interest stories about our exceptional civilian employees and dedicated military teams, and we have kept our community active and engaged with flyers and advertisements for our installation events.

Today, I am writing to inform you that this will be the final issue of the “Spotlight.” While it is bittersweet to close this chapter, our communication needs must evolve alongside modern technology and policy guidance. To streamline how we share event information and base advertisements, we are officially transitioning all installation event updates, promotional flyers, and marketing materials to the My Army Post App. This digital platform will allow us to deliver real-time updates directly to your mobile devices, ensuring you never miss an event, training opportunity, or community gathering. I encourage every member of our workforce, community, and their families to download the app today to stay fully connected (there is a how to guide for My Army Post App later in this issue).

I want to extend my deepest, most sincere gratitude to the PAO team and to everyone who has contributed to the “Spotlight” over the last 2 ½ years. Your stories, your photos, and your dedication made this publication a true reflection of the excellence that defines US Army Garrison Natick. Thank you for your hard work in documenting our history and building our community spirit.

We look forward to continuing to share your stories and achievements through our digital channels. Thank you for your continued service, dedication, and support as we make this positive transition.

Respectfully,

Kozlowski, Gregory J
LTC, SF
USAG Natick Commander

Download MAPA!

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Natick highlights connection, conversation during Suicide Prevention Month

Story by Gregory Boisvert, USAG-Natick Department of Plans, Training, Mobilizations, and Security

More than 50 military personnel and civilians joined a suicide prevention walk, and a Boston broadcaster brought a personal perspective to awareness training as Natick Soldier Systems Center observed Suicide Prevention Month in September.

Centered on the theme "Joining Your Fight: Connect to Protect," the events encouraged participants to strengthen connections, support one another and make conversations about mental health part of everyday life.



The annual Suicide Prevention Month Walk, sponsored by the Garrison Morale and Wellness Committee, brought participants together along the installation's fitness trail. Conversation stations along the route offered prompts to encourage discussion and help colleagues get to know one another beyond their daily work.

The observance continued Sept. 28 with "Talk Saves Lives," a one-hour suicide prevention training at Hunter Auditorium led by Boston broadcaster and suicide prevention advocate David O'Leary.

A longtime radio personality and professional voice-over artist, O'Leary became involved with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention after his cousin, Paul, died by suicide in 1995. His advocacy has included leadership roles in Massachusetts and nationally.

Introducing O'Leary, Lynn Valcourt Blanchet, garrison executive officer, shared how her husband Kevin's death shaped her commitment to suicide prevention and awareness. She met O'Leary through his prevention work after her loss.

"My hope for today is that we don't approach this as just another training to complete," Blanchet said.

She encouraged participants to carry the purpose of the session beyond the auditorium.

"So, I hope today starts conversations, raises our awareness, and helps us pay a little closer attention to one another, because the time we spend here may someday help save someone we love," she said.

Together, the walk and training reinforced the role of connection in the Natick community. Conversation prompts created opportunities to listen, while the training brought colleagues together to focus on suicide prevention.

The month's message extended beyond scheduled events: Reach out, check in and make time for one another. Those connections remain part of supporting the workforce throughout the year.

Natick Soldier Systems Center sunsets social media platforms under new digital media guidance

Story by Vannessa Josey, USAG Natick Public Affairs

In accordance with the Department of the Army's updated digital media optimization guidance, Natick Soldier Systems Center (NSSC) is archiving and closing all social media platforms while expanding the use of alternative official Army digital communication channels. This move enables the NSSC to effectively communicate readiness, provide vital information to Soldiers, Army Civilians, family members, retirees, mission partners, and the surrounding community, as well as eliminate digital redundancy.

As part of this transition, NSSC has unpublished all official installation social media pages and moved all official communications to alternative approved Army platforms designed to provide reliable, mission-focused information while strengthening the Army's digital presence.

Moving forward, NSSC audiences are encouraged to receive installation news, announcements and event information through:

- My Army Post App (MAPA)- Natick
- NSSC Official Website - Home.army.mil/natick
- Digital Visual Information Distribution System (DVIDS)- DVIDSHub.net
- Other authorized .mil websites supporting Army communications

The transition aligns with the Army's effort to streamline our digital channels to amplify our Army stories globally, while delivering more direct, secure, and reliable updates to our families at home.

"As we support this Army directive, ensuring our community continues receiving trusted, timely information through official Army channels remains a priority for the installation," said Lt. Col. Gregory Kozlowski, U.S. Army Garrison Natick commander. "While we are reducing the number of information sharing platforms we manage and operate, our commitment to communicating with our workforce, mission partners and surrounding communities remains unchanged."

MAPA and the Official NSSC website will continue to be resources for installation-specific information, including gate and installation access updates, weather and emergency notifications, event announcements, facility hours, recreational opportunities and other community information. Users can customize notifications on MAPA based on their installation to receive relevant updates directly on their mobile devices.

Official news stories, feature articles, command information and multimedia products will continue to be published on DVIDS and the official Installation website, providing audiences with access to authoritative information about NSSC's people, missions and accomplishments.

The transition supports the Army's broader effort to modernize and secure public communication while reducing duplication across digital platforms.

Community members who previously followed NSSC through social media are encouraged to download MAPA, bookmark the installation's Army.mil (Home.army.mil/natick) webpage and subscribe to available email distribution lists to continue receiving installation news and updates.

NSSC remains committed to transparent, timely and accurate communication with Soldiers, Army Civilians, families, retirees, mission partners and local communities. The Public Affairs professionals assigned to the installation will continue producing news stories, photography, videography and community information pieces that highlight the installation's support to the Soldier and the Army while providing essential information to its stakeholders.

For additional information about NSSC news and events, visit the installation's official Army.mil webpage, download MAPA and follow official content distributed through DVIDS and authorized Army communication channels.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Story by Debbie Herald, USAG Natick Army Community Service

Domestic Violence Awareness Month (DVAM), observed each October, is an opportunity to recognize the impact of abuse, support survivors, and reinforce the shared responsibility to build safe, respectful communities.

The U.S. Army has two themes for 2026, "What's Inside Matters" and "Pause: Your Actions Matter." These themes emphasize that prevention begins with individual choices, self-awareness, and respect for others. They encourage people to examine attitudes and behaviors, consider how actions affect partners and families, and pause before responding in ways that may cause harm. "What's Inside Matters" focuses on victim awareness connecting survivors to support services. "Pause: Your Actions Matter" targeting individuals concerned about their own potentially harmful behaviors, encouraging self-awareness and proactive help-seeking.

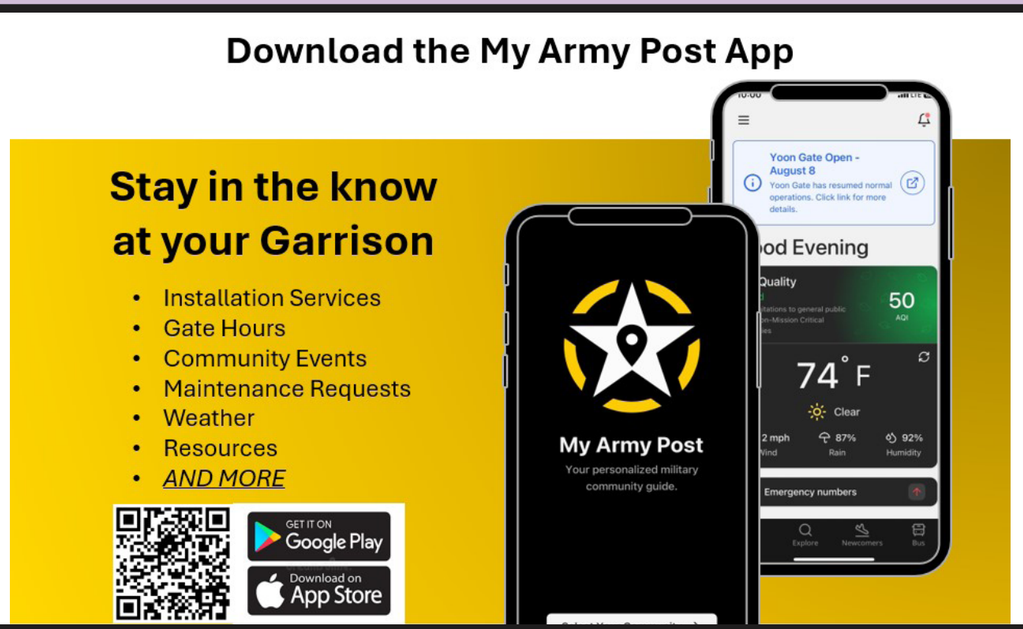
Domestic violence can include physical violence, threats, intimidation, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, stalking, and financial control. It affects people across all ages, genders, backgrounds, and communities.

Survivors may face significant barriers to seeking support, including fear, isolation, financial dependence, concern for children, or uncertainty about available resources.

Awareness requires more than recognizing the issue. It calls for listening without judgment, taking concerns seriously, respecting privacy, and helping connect individuals with appropriate support. Leaders, coworkers, friends, and family members can contribute to prevention by promoting healthy relationships built on trust, communication, consent, accountability, and shared decision-making.

DVAM reminds us that every person has a role in preventing harm. By pausing, reflecting, and choosing respect, we can help create environments where individuals and families feel safe, supported, and empowered to seek help when needed.

If you or someone you know needs help, please contact the National Domestic Violence hotline at 1-800-799-7233. Assistance is available in more than 140 languages, twenty-four hours a day.



Defeating the deep freeze: *Natick team tests innovative thermal blanket on arctic refrigeration fleet*

Story by Timothy J. Bernard, Logistics Team Lead, Quartermaster Service Section, TACOM-ILSC

In the sub-zero proving grounds of interior Alaska, where ambient temperatures can seize equipment and freeze supply chains in their tracks, keeping military rations and temperature-sensitive medical cargo stabilized is one of the Army's most demanding logistics challenges. Last month, from August 24 to August 28, 2026, a five-day joint technical evaluation brought together U.S. Army Corp of Engineers personnel, paratroopers from the 11th Airborne Division, and Natick-based civilian logistics specialists from both the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command Integrated Logistics Support Center (TACOM-ILSC) and Product Manager Force Sustainment Systems (PdM FSS).

Together, they took to the motor pools of Fort Wainwright to test an energy-saving shield against the elements: the Mobile Insulation System for Energy Reduction, or MISER. Their mission was straightforward yet critical: determine whether the MISER thermal blanket can be quickly and safely deployed by combat sustainers over the service's workhorse Multi-Temperature Refrigerated Container Systems (MTRCS). Over the course of the exercise, soldiers assigned to the 574th Composite Supply Company worked side by side with civilian specialists, outfitting both all models of the MTRCS container configurations.



Observers noted that the heavy-duty insulating blanket conformed seamlessly to the container's structural frame. All primary access doors swung cleanly open without binding against the insulation, and tie-down anchor straps tensioned accurately into place without impeding critical airflow around the cooling machinery. Despite the system's operational strengths, the Fort Wainwright evaluation exposed severe ergonomic hurdles inherent to operating in Arctic climates.

The foremost physical hurdle centered on the container's roof panels. Shifting, lifting, and tensioning the dense, insulated ceiling panels over eight-foot-tall ISO container frames proved strenuous. Evaluators determined that installation cannot be done safely with fewer than four soldiers, who also require a dedicated 6-foot ladder that must be staged ahead of time. An even more urgent safety finding involved everyday soldier protective gear. Standard-issue cold-weather gloves and heavy Arctic mittens were found to be too thick to grip and pull the blanket's standard zipper tags. In sub-zero operational settings, soldiers frustrated by uncooperative zippers often remove their gloves to grip small tabs, a behavior that risks rapid contact frostbite within seconds. Following the evaluation, the joint team submitted immediate corrective recommendations to modify the MISER with extended pull-cords, enlarged loop toggles, or lanyard-assisted hardware designed for mitten-clad fingers. As the Department of War continues to rebuild its capability to fight and sustain combat formations in extreme cold weather under the Army Arctic Strategy, thermal resilience is no longer an afterthought. Mobile refrigeration containers do not merely protect fresh food; they safeguard vaccines, whole blood supplies, and vital chemical compounds that degrade instantly when exposed to sub-zero shock. The Natick team and the 11th Airborne Division are ensuring that when winter strikes, the Army's cold-chain infrastructure will remain ready, mobile, and mission capable.





NSSC IN THE COMMUNITY

Members of Natick Soldier Systems Center attended the Natick 9/11 25th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony showing solidarity and honor the memory of those lost on that fateful day.

Photos by Jeff Sisto, DEVCOM Soldier Center, Public Affairs









3rd Annual Watermelon Drop STEM Competition

Story by Alfred Tripolone III, USAG Natick Public Affairs

Watermelons took flight at Natick Soldier Systems Center as students put their engineering skills to the test during the DEVCOM Soldier Center's third annual Watermelon Airdrop STEM Challenge.

Sixteen teams participated in this year's competition, designing systems intended to protect a watermelon during a drop from approximately 80 feet. The event gave students a hands-on opportunity to apply engineering concepts while connecting those lessons to real-world careers in science, technology and mathematics. Teams received materials to develop their designs, with this year's options expanded to include materials such as paper bags and cardboard. Students worked together to determine how to construct their parachutes and protect their watermelons before putting their designs to the test.

For participant Danton Bunkley and his team, the Drop Squad, the process began by studying previous drops and combining ideas from across the group.

"We watched the videos and everyone added their own ideas," Bunkley said.

Bunkley said putting all of those ideas together was the most difficult part of the challenge. As his team's watermelon was released, his thoughts became considerably simpler: "Is it going to break?"

The challenge gave students an opportunity to learn through both successful and unsuccessful designs in an environment where experimentation is encouraged.

"Competitions like this are great because they let students test things out and have fun at the same time," said Brady Loomer, Soldier Center STEM coordinator.

For Bunkley, the experience included learning about different types of parachutes and considering how his team could improve its design. If he participated again, he said he would change the amount of padding protecting the watermelon.

"Yes! It was a fun way to use your mind and learn different ways to create things," Bunkley said when asked if he would participate in another STEM challenge.

The competition also connects students with a field directly related to the Soldier Center's mission. Airdrop research at Natick includes both personnel and cargo delivery, including the development of methods to deliver equipment and supplies from aircraft. The challenge introduced students to concepts such as mechanics and system design that are applicable across the center's research and development mission.

Beyond the immediate lessons, Soldier Center leaders see events such as the Watermelon Airdrop Challenge as an opportunity to build relationships with students and families while developing interest in STEM careers.

"STEM outreach doesn't just mean STEM activities; it extends into recruiting our future workforce and retaining employees," said Craig Rettie, director of Research & Technology Integration and Soldier Center deputy director. "Events like this are the building blocks."

Rettie said engaging elementary, middle and high school students can encourage them to explore careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics - fields that support innovation both within the Soldier Center and across the country.

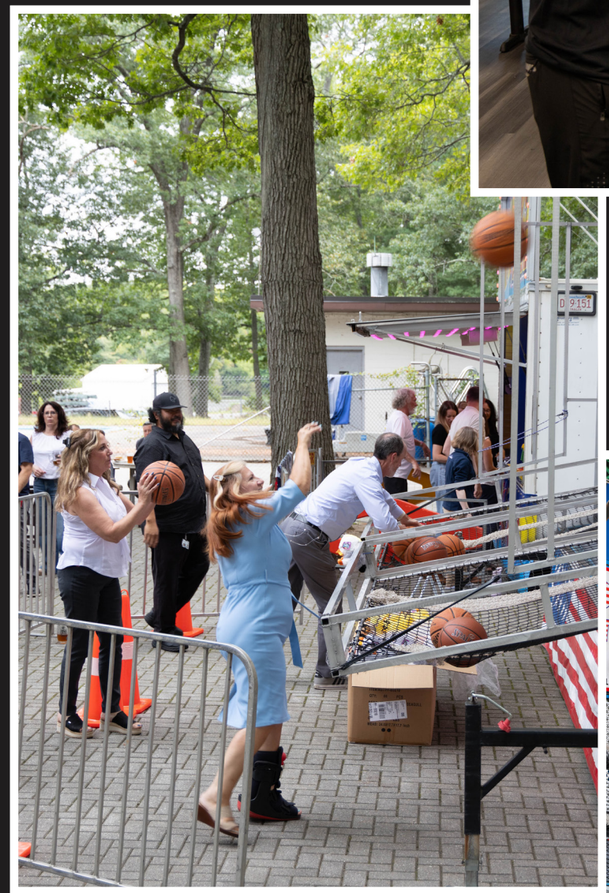
Now in its third year, the Watermelon Airdrop Challenge combines short-term excitement with a long-term goal:: giving students and families an opportunity to come together, experiment and see STEM concepts in action.

For Bunkley, one moment stood out after the designing, building and anticipation of watching the watermelon fall.

His favorite part was "getting an award at the end."

OKTOBERFEST at NSSC







NSSC IN THE COMMUNITY

Members of Natick Soldier Systems Center joined the annual Natick Days festivities at the town commons. Soldiers and civilians from DEVCOM Soldier Center, USARIEM, and more joined together to show a unified idea of what NSSC does for the Army and the country as a whole. Showcasing new and updated technologies to better serve the warfighter.









The Value of Military and Family Life Counselors

Story by Debbie Herald, USAG Natick Army Community Service

Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLCs) provide an important source of support for service members and their immediate families. Military life can bring frequent moves, deployments, separations, demanding work schedules, school transitions, and the stress of adapting to new communities. MFLCs help individuals and families manage those challenges before they become larger problems.

A key value of the program is accessibility. Counselors are often available in places where military-connected people already spend time, including installations, schools, child and youth programs, and family-support settings. This makes it easier for someone to seek support without navigating a complicated referral process or waiting for a formal appointment. Services are confidential.

MFLCs can assist with common, non-medical concerns such as deployment and reintegration stress, relationship communication, parenting challenges, work-life balance, grief, school adjustment, and relocation. For children and adolescents, counselors can provide age-appropriate support that helps them understand and cope with changes in their family or school environment.

The program also supports readiness. When service members and families have practical tools to manage stress, resolve conflicts, and strengthen communication, they are better positioned to meet personal and professional demands. Family stability and resilience can reduce distractions and help service members remain focused on their mission.

MFLCs normalize help-seeking. Speaking with a counselor does not mean someone is failing or unable to cope. It can be a proactive step to build skills, gain perspective, and address concerns early. By providing confidential, short-term support within established program limits, MFLCs offer a trusted resource for strengthening military families and communities.

Military and Family Life Counselors contribute to well-being, resilience, and readiness by helping military-connected individuals face everyday challenges with practical support and informed guidance. Connect with an MFLC on USAG Natick every Tuesday between 0900-1500, Bldg. 1 Room A220. Appointments can be scheduled by contacting 781-315-7992 and are available in person or virtually.

MASSACHUSETTS EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF VETERANS SERVICES (EOVS)

EOVS is coming to Natick Soldier System Center (NSSC)

Meet one on one with EOVS staff for personalized help accessing state and VA benefits, including financial, educational, employment, and more! *No appointments required.*

DATE
Thursday, November 12, 2026

TIME
10:00 AM - 2:00 PM

LOCATION
Lord Community Center, 10 General Greene Ave, Natick, MA

OPEN TO
All Veterans, Service Members, and Family Members of Veterans

The EOVS team can help connect with:

- Chapter 115 and Annuities Benefits
- Veterans Education, Employment and Training Benefits
- Massachusetts Veterans Homes at Chelsea and Holyoke Benefits
- State Veterans Memorial Cemeteries
- Women Veterans Network
- Veteran Advocacy and Empowerment Services
- Housing, Equity, Resilience, and Outreach Services

and more!

NON-CAC HOLDERS/ EXTERNAL GUESTS
Please contact the NSSC Veterans Council in advance to submit a Visitor Request Form to the Directorate of Emergency Services (DES) desk:
Brian.j.balough.civ@army.mil

Mass.gov/EOVS

Trees for Soldiers: Bringing the Warmth of the Holidays to Military Families

As the holiday season approaches, the spirit of giving takes center stage across New England. The annual Trees for Soldiers campaign organized by the United States Army Garrison Natick, alongside generous tree donations from Operation Service and the VFW is dedicated to brightening the holidays for active-duty service members, veterans, and their loved ones.

Through this initiative, military families across all branches receive a complimentary, farm-grown holiday tree. Beyond providing a centerpiece for seasonal celebrations, the campaign helps families preserve cherished holiday traditions an essential comfort during deployments, demanding duty schedules, and economic challenges.

Adding to the festive atmosphere, this year's distribution event features major community partnerships with the New England Patriots, the Kraft Family Foundation, and the Boston Bruins. Attendees of all ages can look forward to special appearances by team mascots Pat Patriot and Blades the Bruin, along with exclusive photo opportunities and autograph sessions with Patriots alumni.

Supporting Those Who Serve

Deployments and frequent relocations often make celebrating the holidays a challenge for military households. By delivering a touch of home, Trees for Soldiers ensures that service members and veterans know their dedication is recognized and appreciated by the community.

"Our goal is simple: ensure that no military family or veteran goes without a real holiday tree," noted campaign organizers." A decorated tree is more than just greenery it represents community, gratitude, and the enduring warmth of home."

Who: All Natick region Active Duty Service Members and Veterans
What: Trees for Soldiers 2026
When: Friday, 3 December 2026, from 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Where: Flagpole area in front of Building 1
Why: To provide a free, farm-grown holiday tree to service members, veterans, and military families during the holiday season. The program is intended to express public appreciation for their service and sacrifice, strengthen holiday morale, and help families create a sense of home especially when a member is deployed or otherwise away from family.

OPERATION SERVICE AND THE VFW PRESENT:

TREES FOR SOLDIERS

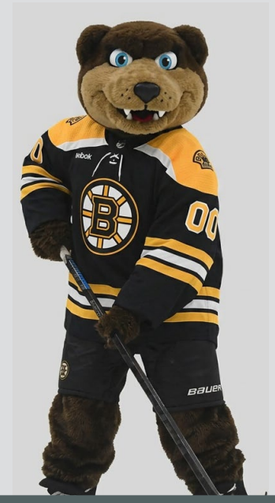
FREE HOLIDAY TREES

Event is open to ALL Military Service Members and Veterans



DATE: December 4th 2026
TIME: 9AM – 3 PM
LOCATION: 10 General Greene Ave,
Natick, MA 01760
Infront of Building 1
(Carney Hall)





MEET AND GREET WITH:
Pat Patriot,
Patriots Alumni,
and Blades

Hosted by: Operation Service, VFW Massachusetts, and USAG Natick

NSSC Honors Departing Religious Affairs NCO

Story by Lynn Valcourt-Blanchett, USAG Natick Executive Officer

The Natick Soldier Systems Center community recognized their departing religious Affairs Noncommissioned Officer, Sgt. Thomas, during a retirement and award ceremony held Thursday, Sept. 17, honoring her service to NSSC and the Soldiers, civilians and families she supported.



Thomas served at NSSC from December 2024 through September 2026 as the religious affairs noncommissioned officer, Installation Better Opportunities for Single Soldier (BOSS) President, and BOSS Secretary. In these roles, she demonstrated a strong commitment to service, resilience and the well-being of the workforce.

As religious affairs NCO, Thomas provided administrative, logistical and operational support to the Chaplain's Office, strengthening religious support operations throughout the command. She also developed and conducted Building Ready and Resilient training sessions that equipped Soldiers and civilians with critical coping skills, strengthened workforce cohesion and enhanced morale across the installation.

In her additional roles, she served as the BOSS President and Secretary, helping guide the program to the strong, thriving state it enjoys today—directly influencing Soldier quality-of-life and community engagement across the installation.

During the ceremony, Brig. Gen. George C. Hackler recognized Thomas for her dedication and contributions to the NSSC community and presented her retirement certificate.

"It has been a pleasure having SGT Thomas serve as part of this organization, and I'm proud of everything she has accomplished during her time at Natick. Throughout her service here, I have consistently heard positive things about her professionalism, character and the way she supports others. She has made a lasting contribution to this community, and I wish her nothing but success as she begins this next chapter."

Command Sgt. Maj. Jeremy Bunkley also reflected on Thomas' service, leadership and impact during her time at NSSC. "SGT Thomas brought tremendous value to our Army and this community, from strengthening the BOSS program to supporting the religious and spiritual needs of our Soldiers and civilians." Bunkley added, "She's been a peoplefirst leader and an example for junior NCOs to follow, and her impact at Natick won't be forgotten."

Reflecting on her time at NSSC and her Army career, Thomas shared:

"I'm incredibly grateful for all the love and support I've received from the Natick community during my time here. There was honestly never a day that I dreaded coming to work. I looked forward to coming in, accomplishing the mission and finding ways to make things better for the people around me. Natick has been a very special part of my Army career, and I'll always be thankful for the people and relationships I'm taking with me."

Thomas' professionalism, compassion and selfless service left a lasting impact on NSSC. The community wishes her continued success and happiness as she heads to Hawaii to begin the next chapter of life.

Personal Financial Counselors Strengthen Active-Duty Financial Readiness

Story by Debbie Herald, USAG Natick Army Community Service

Active Duty service members often face financial circumstances that differ from those of civilian households. Permanent changes of station, deployments, changing allowances, family transitions, and demanding work schedules can complicate routine financial decisions. Personal Financial Counselors (PFC) provide practical, individualized guidance that helps members organize their finances, reduce stress, and prepare for short and long term goals. Their value extends beyond resolving immediate problems: counseling can support readiness by helping service members make informed decisions before financial issues affect duty performance, family stability, or mission focus.

One major benefit of working with a PFC is assistance with everyday money management. Service members may need to balance base pay, allowances, special pays, housing costs, transportation, childcare, debt payments, savings, and other household expenses. A counselor can help develop a realistic spending plan that reflects the member's actual circumstances, especially in a high cost of living area. This process can identify unnecessary expenses, establish savings priorities, and create a clearer picture of available income. Military financial management programs commonly provide support on budgeting, credit, debt, savings, investing, insurance, taxes, and major purchases.

PFC's are especially valuable during major life and career transitions. Marriage, the birth of a child, relocation, deployment, promotion, separation, or retirement can quickly alter a household's financial situation. These events may involve new expenses, changes in income, and decisions with long-term consequences. A PFC can help members anticipate costs, review options, and establish priorities before making commitments. For example, a member considering a vehicle purchase, home purchase, loan, or education expense can use counseling to compare alternatives and understand the full financial effect of each choice.

Debt management and consumer awareness are also important areas of support. High-interest credit cards, expensive loans, and poorly understood contracts can create financial pressure that lasts for years. PFC's can help members understand loan terms, compare borrowing options, develop repayment strategies, and avoid decisions that conflict with their financial goals. Military financial resources also address debt coaching, consumer protections, and financial legal matters relevant to service members and their families.

Counseling is not limited to servicemembers experiencing financial difficulty. Servicemembers with stable finances can use a counselor to build an emergency fund, set savings goals, review retirement contributions, plan for education expenses, and prepare for eventual transition from military service. Eligible service members and families can seek support through Army Community Service and Military OneSource, including remote counseling options in many cases.

At USAG Natick, a PFC is available for the Active Duty population by appointment on Wednesdays from 0900-1200. To schedule an appointment, please email pfc.wellesley@magellanfederal.com or call 774-478-0130. Group classes are also available by request.

From Response to Resilience: USAG Natick Exercises Long-Term Recovery in “White Haze II”

Story by Brian Simeone, Emergency Manager, U.S. Army Garrison Natick

In emergency management, training exercises almost always focus on the “flashy” initial hours of a crisis—sirens, flashing lights, evacuations, and tactical first responders. However, the true test of an installation’s resilience is what happens after the sirens fade. To tackle this challenge, USAG Natick conducted the NSSC Annual Integrated Protection Exercise “White Haze II” Tabletop Exercise (TTX) on 17 September 2026.

This exercise was a direct continuation of last year’s “White Haze I,” which tested the high-adrenaline, chaotic first 48 hours of response following a simulated 110-gallon hydrochloric acid spill. Rather than starting a brand-new scenario, White Haze II picked up exactly where last year’s exercise ended: at the T+48 hour mark, when the scene was formally handed over from first responders and federal investigators (FBI/CID) back to Garrison control.

Why We Focus on Recovery (And How It Helps Us)
While immediate emergency response is designed to save lives and stabilize a scene, recovery operations are what save the mission. For a research-intensive installation like Natick, an extended facility closure can disrupt years of vital scientific work.
Deliberately planning and exercising recovery is how we:
- Minimize long-term operational downtime.
- Protect multi-million dollar research assets.
- Ensure the health and safety of personnel returning to remediated facilities.
- Seamlessly transition the garrison back to steady-state operations.

A Rare Opportunity: Activating the Recovery Working Group (RWG)
Because recovery is a slow, methodical process, garrisons rarely have the opportunity to exercise it in a training environment. White Haze II provided a unique platform to activate and stress-test USAG Natick’s Recovery Working Group (RWG) under the leadership of the Deputy Garrison Commander and the Directorate of Public Works (DPW). The exercise brought together key stakeholders from across the installation—including DPW, PM-FSS, DEVCOM Emergency Management, the Installation Safety Office, DES, DPTMS, and the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM)—forcing them to pivot from tactical incident command to collaborative, long-term governance.

Exercise Objectives and Crucial Lessons Learned
Working in the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and via concurrent conference calls, participants focused on achieving four primary objectives: accepting the site back from external agencies, establishing a recovery-focused Common Operating Picture (COP), managing specialized hazardous materials (HAZMAT) cleanup, and stabilizing Building 3’s infrastructure.

Several critical lessons emerged from the discussions:

1. Identifying Hidden Vulnerabilities: The exercise highlighted the Building 3 mercury treatment system as a critical asset with installation-wide mission impacts. This underscored the need for all tenant organizations to have a shared awareness of interconnected utility systems that, if damaged, can cause cascading failures across the garrison.
2. Sustaining Mission Continuity (COOP): DEVCOM utilized the exercise to rigorously review its Continuity of Operations (COOP) measures for an extended displacement. This included validating alternate work locations, tracking displaced personnel accountability, and establishing protocols to sustain critical research during months of specialized building remediation.
3. Logistical and Security Support: The group identified the need for pre-planned, long-term vendor access and extended security support. Coordinating how civilian cleanup crews and specialized contractors safely access the installation over several months is vital to avoiding administrative delays.

Looking Forward
By shifting the spotlight from immediate response to the complex realities of recovery, White Haze II successfully bridged the gap between emergency action and long-term installation readiness. The practical insights gained from this exercise will directly update the USAG Natick Installation Emergency Management Plan (IEMP 10-2), ensuring that if a real-world disaster strikes, the road back to normal operations is fast, synchronized, and resilient.

CALLING ALL LANDLORDS!!

Looking to market your rental property to Service members or DoD Civilians?

GET STARTED

STEP 1: SCAN THE QR CODE FOR DIRECT ACCESS TO **HOMES.MIL**

STEP 2 : FIND INSTALLATION: **ARMY USAG NATICK SSC**

Find Installation: ARMY USAG NATICK SSC

STEP 3 : SELECT - **PROPERTY MANAGERS LEARN MORE** .

THEN **CREATE AN ACCOUNT.**

LISTINGS ARE REVIEWED AND MONITORED BY LOCAL INSTALLATION HOUSING SERVICES OFFICES TO SUPPORT MILITARY STANDARD.

AND IT'S COMPLETELY **FREE** !

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS ON HOW TO GET STARTED PLEASE CONTACT NSSC HOUSING OFFICE :
EMAIL *:usarmy.natick.id-t2.mbx.natickarmyhousing@army.mil*
PHONE: *(520) 725-6268*

U.S. Army Natick Soldier Systems Center
Research · Develop · Acquire · Sustain

Housing Services Office

ARMY HOUSING
Housing America's Soldiers and Families



Harvest Safety: *Your guide to a healthy Autumn U-Pick season in New England*

Story by Louis Calcagni, U.S. Army Garrison Natick Safety Office

THE HIDDEN RISKS IN AUTUMN FIELDS

Fresh fruits and vegetables grown at U-Pick fields across New England are potentially susceptible to biological hazards. The primary culprits are bacteria (like E. coli, Salmonella, and Listeria), viru ses (like Norovirus), and parasites (like Cyclospora).

U-PICK FIELD RED FLAGS: WHAT TO AVOID

- "Drops" (Ground Fruit): Never pick or eat fruit that has already fallen to the ground.
- Visible Contamination: Avoid any produce with bird droppings, animal feces, or heavy mud/dirt that cannot be easily inspected.
- Animal Damage: Skip produce that shows signs of being damaged by wildlife.
- Bruises, Cuts, and Decay: Damaged skin provides an easy entry point for pathogens to multiply deep inside the flesh of the produce.
- Standing Water: Avoid harvesting from plants sitting in pooled water.

3 EASY STEPS TO MITIGATE YOUR RISK

1. Practice Clean Hand Hygiene: Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after picking, before eating, after using the restroom, and when visibly dirty.
2. Wash Produce Properly Before Eating: Thoroughly rinse all fruits and vegetables under cool, running tap water and use a clean produce brush to scrub firm items (like pumpkins, squash, or apples).
3. Keep It Cool: Store perishable items in refrigerator at 40 F or below.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF FOODBORNE ILLNESS

Symptoms of food poisoning can appear a few hours to several days after consuming contaminated food.

Common Symptoms: Nausea and vomiting, painful abdominal cramps, diarrhea, low-grade fever and chills, headaches and muscle fatigue

Seek Medical Attention For: Bloody diarrhea or vomit, severe pain, illness lasting more than 3 days, signs of dehydration, fever over 102 F, babies / elderly / immunocompromised

NSSC FOOD DRIVE

Oct. 26–Nov. 19

A PLACE TO TURN FOOD PANTRY

Help our Natick neighbors in need!

MOST-NEEDED ITEMS

- Pasta
- Spaghetti sauce • 24 oz
- Canned beans
- Canned fruit • pineapple, mixed fruit, mandarin oranges
- Diapers • all sizes, especially 4, 5 & 6
- Baby wipes
- New or gently used handled paper bags



Thanksgiving meal items also welcome!

Bring a donation or two to collection boxes in buildings throughout post.

Supporting A Place to Turn Food Pantry in Natick

Questions? Garrison XO Lynn Valcourt

Lynn.m.valcourt.civ@army.mil 508-277-1371

Material was developed with assistance of generative AI

Recognizing National Disability Employment Awareness Month: *Celebrating Talent and Accessibility at NSSC*

By Equal Employment Opportunity Office, Natick Soldier Systems Center

This October, the Natick Soldier Systems Center (NSSC) joins the Department of Defense and the nation in observing National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). This month-long campaign serves as a powerful reminder of the immense value, talent, and dedication that individuals with disabilities bring to our workforce, our mission, and our community.

The theme for this year's observance—"Celebrating Value and Talent"—perfectly reflects the ethos of NSSC. In the military civilian workforce, mission readiness relies entirely on diverse perspectives and specialized skills. Employees with disabilities work across every sector of our installation, driving innovation and providing the critical research, development, and engineering support our warfighters depend on daily.

Historically, this observance began in 1945 when Congress declared the first week of October as "National Employment of the Physically Handicapped Week." In 1988, the week was expanded to a full month and renamed to include all forms of disabilities. Today, the Army uses this time to not only celebrate our current team members but to reaffirm our commitment to eliminating barriers to employment.

As a close-knit installation, NSSC actively champions this commitment by providing tools and pathways to build a fully inclusive workforce. This includes leveraging the Schedule A Hiring Authority, a streamlined, non-competitive hiring process that allows the Army to fast-track qualified individuals with disabilities into critical federal civilian roles.

Reasonable Accommodations are highly individualized and can take many forms depending on a person's unique operational needs. Common examples utilized across the workforce include:

- Flexible Scheduling: Implementing modified hours or flextime to enable employees to attend routine physical therapy sessions or medical appointments.
- Environmental Adjustments: Allowing the use of noise-canceling headphones or sound-dampening panels to improve concentration and reduce cognitive distractions.
- Ergonomic Equipment: Supplying specialized desks or adjustable ergonomic chairs to minimize physical strain and accommodate musculoskeletal limitations.
- Assistive Technology: Integrating screen readers, voice-to-text software, or adaptive communication tools into the daily workflow.

For workforce members seeking information or navigating the accommodation process, highly valuable external resource databases are available to guide you. The Job Accommodation Network (askJAN.org) provides free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace adjustments and disability employment solutions. Additionally, the Department of Defense's Computer/Electronic Accommodations Program (cap.mil) offers assistive technology and equipment at no cost to ensure federal civilian employees succeed in their daily tasks.

Contact & Support: While NSSC may be a small installation, our commitment to supporting every employee is absolute. If you are an employee seeking a Reasonable Accommodation, or if you have questions about available workforce resources, please reach out directly to NSSC's EEO representative,

Brian Balough, at brian.j.balough.civ@army.mil.

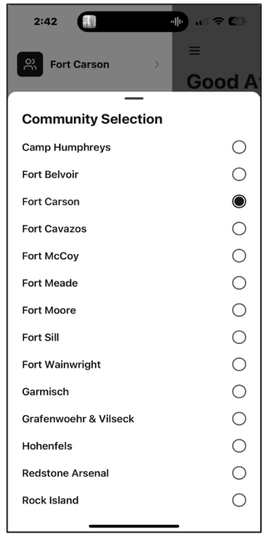


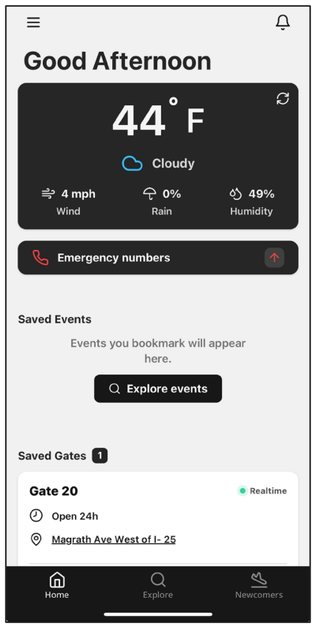
APP Features

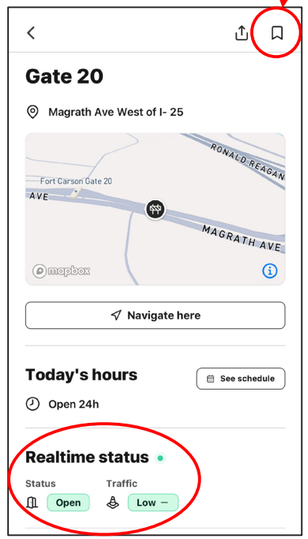
- Gate real time status
- Map directions
- Notifications (delays, closures)
- Allows individuals to switch installations when on TDY or PCSing
- Bookmarks

Customize Your Homepage:

- Bookmark your preferred gate to track its status.
- Bookmark upcoming events to see updates.







Natick SSC

Enabling readiness and resilience for Soldiers, Retirees, Civilians, and their Families

November 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)				
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
		South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)	Veteran's Day	Turkey Trot (Fun Run)		
				South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)		
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
		South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)		Right Arm Night		
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
				Thanksgiving		
29	30					Food Truck
						Building 32
						Building 1 Café
						BOSS BLDG 32
						Holiday Closed

All programming subject to change

Natick SSC

Enabling readiness and resilience for Soldiers, Retirees, Civilians, and their Families

December 2026

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1	2	3	4	5
					Trees For Soldiers	
		South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)			Christmas Tree Lighting	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)			Jingle Jog (Fun Run)	
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
		South Pointe Bar (1500 - 1800)		Right Arm Night		
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
					Christmas	
27	28	29	30	31		Food Truck
						Building 32
						Building 1 Café
						BOSS BLDG 32
						Holiday Closed

All programming subject to change

NSSC Online

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- News: *https://www.army.mil/natick*

DEVCOM Soldier Center Online:
- Webpage: *https://sc.devcom.army.mil*

U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine:
- Webpage: https://usariem.health.mil/



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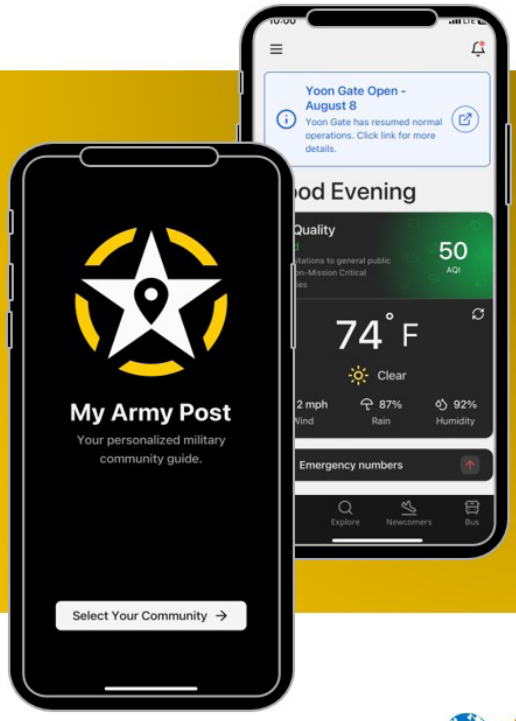

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