

Landguth: Embrace the Base program serves military

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South Dakota and the Black Hills have always been very welcoming to those who serve in the military.

Whether stationed at Ellsworth Air Force Base, the South Dakota National Guard at Camp Rapid, or veterans calling South Dakota home, the local community has always risen up to show our appreciation for their service and welcome them to our community.

However, the interests and needs of military members and their families are not the same today as they were 50 years ago. Over the past year, community leaders and organizations have come together to renew our focus on supporting the military.

Embrace the Base is a local campaign organized by community and business leaders to raise funds and promote military discounts throughout the Black Hills. There are numerous businesses throughout the community that offer generous discounts to veterans, military personnel, and their families.

The goal of Embrace the Base is to help promote the discount opportunities to our military population. We know that military members often feel awkward asking for a discount. Therefore, the Embrace the Base campaign gives businesses a sign to put in their window that indicates to the service member and veteran that their location supports our troops and offers a discount on products and/or services.

Eventually, Embrace the Base will feature training for businesses and their employees on the military rank structure, basic military life, and an overview of the mission and operations of our local military installations. This training is intended to increase awareness of the daily lives and sacrifices of our military and veterans, thus building understanding and increasing customer service to our military members.

In direct response to the Air Force's focus on Airmen and family quality of life, the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority recently created and staffed a position that focuses solely on building programming to connect Airmen and families on base with activities, resources and opportunities off base.

This position will work hand-in-hand with base leadership to strengthen the conduit between the community and the base and can be viewed as a concierge for our military members and their families when it comes to ways the community can help. There will be a focus on job connections, discount programs, communicating events and activities, and fundraising to support base programs in ways that bring larger impact to Airmen and families. Elevating the quality of life of our Airmen and their families is a focus for communities throughout the Black Hills.

The creation of the Military Community Relations position and the Embrace the Base campaign exemplifies the commitment the Black Hills has in supporting the mission of Ellsworth Air Force Base and the South Dakota National Guard by supporting its most valuable asset — people.

Scott Landguth is the Executive Director of the South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority. The Authority's mission is to ensure that South Dakota and the Black Hills are a great place for the Air Force to conduct its mission.