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By Magen James

Alaska Coalition for Veterans and Military Families executive director

Mask Makers on JBER are on a mission

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska —The Alaska Coalition for Veterans and Military Families, a non-profit group that provides social services and resources for Alaska veterans and military families, has been working to disseminate cloth face masks to active duty and National Guard service members, as well as first responders, their families and children of first responders in child care.

In just over two weeks, the group of primarily JBER spouses has provided about 3,000 masks to the Anchorage, JBER, Eagle River and Matanuska-Susitna communities.

They call themselves the JBER Mask Makers — a group of JBER spouses, Soldiers and Airmen, who learned to sew (or perfected their skill) to make the masks. Many of the military spouses working on the project have lost their jobs due to COVID-19, and they want to help the community during this crisis.

There are 25 paid spouses and family members, and about 50 volunteers, all dedicated to the Mask Maker mission. They are cutting and sewing masks for military members, first responders, and their families. The coalition is working with various agencies to distribute the masks to those who need them most.

Others in Anchorage are busy crocheting headbands and ear-savers to attach to masks, especially the N95s used by healthcare workers.

In a matter of weeks, AKCVMF was able to secure funding to purchase the majority of these supplies and begin providing stipends for a dedicated group of Makers. AKCVMF is hoping to hire more unemployed spouses to ease their financial burden.

The Mask Makers have a goal of producing as many masks as they are able to raise funds for with the hope of extending beyond Anchorage and into rural communities as well.

“AKCVMF has always been a solution oriented agency and this is one solution where we can have a significant impact,” said Magen James, AKCVMF executive director. “And we have.”

The coalition needs more donations of supplies, such as fabric, buttons and ties for the masks. The coalition is raising funds through a Facebook fundraiser as well as through their website and available grants.

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To request masks or information on volunteer opportunities, or to contribute materials, please contact Magen James at magen.james2@alaska.gov. Please visit akcvmf.org/ and like their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/donate/270871263909989/.

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ABOUT AKCVMF: The Alaska Coalition for Veterans and Military Families is a network of organizations throughout Alaska who work together to assess and meet the needs of our service members, veterans and their families. The Coalition is a 501(c)3 with the Internal Revenue Service. Their EIN is 83-2855885.