

Maj. Gen. Torrence Saxe

Commissioner & Adjutant General

www.DMVA.Alaska.Gov



Alaska National Guard

*Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs*

Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska

STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

020-037

April 29, 2020

By Spc. Grace Nechanicky

Joint Force Headquarters

Alaska volunteers give gift baskets to newborns of Guardsmen

JOINT BASE ELMENDORF-RICHARDSON, Alaska — In honor of Volunteer Appreciation Month, two Alaska National Guard volunteers, Kendra Gladwell and Karen Jenkins, were recognized for their roles in starting the Baby Bundle project. This program donates gift baskets to newborns of Alaska National Guard members.

The program originally began six years ago when the two women started crocheting blankets and purchasing baskets to give to new 176th Wing Air Guard babies and it grew into a collaborative effort.

Jenkins, an educator at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center, reached out to the facility's Give Back project, an annual program that allows inmates to give back to the community by volunteering time and services. With the help of women at HMCC, Jenkins and Gladwell were able to package more baby bundles for the program. A total of 165 blankets have been crocheted so far, along with hand-sewn totes.

Each gift basket includes a handmade blanket, along with baby books donated from the Barnes & Noble Holiday Drive and FirstBook, which is a nonprofit social enterprise that provides new books, learning materials and other essentials for children.

The Baby Bundles have since reached across all of the Alaska National Guard and are available to Airmen and Soldiers. Recently, 50 baby bundles were distributed to units at Eielson Air Force Base and Clear Air Force Station, and are now available at Warrior and Family Services at the Joint Force Headquarters in the National Guard armory on JBER.

Each unit, key spouse, Family Readiness Group volunteer or First Sergeant is encouraged to pick up baby bundles from the Warrior and Family Services office or the 176th Wing Airman and Family Readiness office for distribution to families with newborns.

The program is still in need of yarn donations to continue program efforts. Those interested in donating or assisting with this project may contact Master Sgt. Melissa Erhard at 907-552-6135 or melissa.erhard.1@us.af.mil, or Octavia Thompson, State Family Program Director, Warrior and Family Services at 907-428-6663. Arrangements may be made to distribute the baby bundles to Guard families during isolation efforts due to COVID-19.

###

PHOTOS

1. **Attached pdf** includes story and a small selection of low-resolution photos for viewing on screen.
2. **Flickr link** includes an event album with the complete selection of full-resolution, free downloadable images. (May not be accessible from all military computers.)
3. **DVIDS link** includes story and selected full-resolution photos. (Primarily for media, DVIDS is accessible from .mil computers.)



Ashley Shelton, the Alaska National Guard Sexual Assault Response Coordinator, and Keira Spaulding, the Alaska National Guard Military and Family Readiness specialist, go through the hand-knit baby bundle blankets at the Alaska National Guard armory, April 28, 2020. The baby bundles are available at the Warrior and Family Services office for Alaska Guardsmen with newborns as part of the Baby Bundle project put together by the 176th Wing's key spouse volunteers, Kendra Gladwell and Karen Jenkins. (U.S. Army National Guard photo by Spc. Grace Nechanicky/Released)