

Helping survivors learn to breathe again

By Connie J. Schlosberg

Funneling her energy between her job as chief of program control for FMA and volunteer work, Debbie Lombardi is living proof on how to give more and live more by devoting her time for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS). TAPS provides a network of comfort and empathy for military families who lost loved ones in the line of duty. Their mission is to offer peer support and assist survivors through a wide variety of programs. They work side by side with military, veterans and government agencies to help families successfully deal with the sadness and problems that arise well after the tragedies happen.

For Debbie, this organization is a personal passion. In 1984, her husband died in a military plane crash. At that time, there was no assistance program to help her once the official causality case file was closed. Once the file was closed, all assistance ceased and she was required to move her family from military family housing to a location off base. Having spent years as a military officer's wife, she felt displaced with no one to turn to for answers until 1997 when TAPS founder Bonnie Carroll came to Peterson for a visit with Air Force Space Command. Through a special request from then 21st Space Wing Commander, Brigadier General Drennan, Debbie met with Bonnie who invited her to attend their annual National Military Survivor Seminar & Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors held during the Memorial Day weekend in Washington D.C.

Since its humble beginnings in 1994, TAPS gives grieving families and friends the strength they need to carry on after the loss of someone special. Support is provided to family and friends of military loved ones who have passed on. No one is turned away. Proceeds to the organization go towards numerous programs TAPS offers to survivors including transportation and lodging to attend the Memorial Day weekend seminar in Washington D.C. They also offer special programs for coping with suicide as well as programs for children. The Good Grief Camp for Young Survivors is held simultaneously with the National Military Survivor Seminar where arts and crafts activities are used to help children heal. Debbie's face lights up speaking about the families she has met "who have learned to breathe again" by releasing their emotions and finding solace visiting the Nation's Capitol and all that it stands for.

Inspired by the TAPS program, the Home Front Cares is a local non-profit organization that puts together a network of hope for surviving families. Their goal is to provide emergency financial assistance, goods and services to Colorado military families. Last year, the Home Front Cares organization held a seminar at Fort Carson for families to unite together to share experiences on the ultimate price of war. Their next event – For the Love of Our Troops IV Annual Dinner - will be held on 2 October at the Antler's Hilton Hotel. Featured guest speakers are retired Air Force General Richard B. Meyers and the Air Force Academy's Head Football Coach Troy Calhoun. Nothing will ever take away the heartache of losing a loved one, but

organizations like TAPS and the Home Front Cares are performing a great service of alleviating the pain and desolation for grieving families.

Please visit www.taps.org and www.thehomefrontcares.org for more information.