

Maintaining resiliency in paradise

By Tech. Sgt. Garrett Cole, 624th Regional Support Group / Published July 31, 2020



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U.S. Air Force Senior Airman Pleiades Dolor, 624th Civil Engineer Squadron heavy equipment specialist, levels the ground in preparation for pavement repairs at Bellows Air Force Station, Hawaii, July 22, 2020, during the unit's Annual Training. The U.S. Air Force Reserve's 624th CES provided necessary repairs at Bellows AFS, a Military Welfare and Recreation facility that supports military families and communities, to improve infrastructure and increase individual readiness skills. (U.S. Air Force photo by Tech. Sgt. Garrett

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JOINT BASE PEARL HARBOR-HICKAM, Hawaii --

With Air Force suicide rates rising 33 percent in 2019, and the numbers are trending upwards this year. It is vital for the military to provide the proper tools for resiliency to all members, especially those returning from deployment. Fortunately, Military Wellness and Recreation assists as a part of the whole structure that military resiliency in their recreation facilities, namely Bellows Air Force Station on the northeast side of Oahu.

The 624th Civil Engineer Squadron is getting a chance to support military resiliency by sending members to Bellows for facility maintenance and updates mid-July to aid in that mission.

According to Staff Sgt. Craig Inomoto, 624th CES Operations Management noncommissioned officer-in-charge, Bellows, originally a landing strip during World War II, now serves as a strategic location for members and their families to build and maintain resiliency. The site services military members, Department of Defense employees, retirees, and their families.

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"Bellows is a stark contrast to the high-stress tempo environment and family separation members feel when deployed," said Inomoto. "Bellows acts as a recreation and relaxation type of facility where you can unwind. Deplorers can prepare mentally before and after a deployment."

With the importance of Bellows, upkeep and maintenance of the facilities are a priority. According to Maj. Shaun Kagawa, 624th CES Operations Flight commander, the 624th CES was able to focus on annual training requirements to meet both facility upkeep and maintaining mission critical skills proficiency.

"The kind of work that we do is pretty much all the trades in construction," said Kagawa. "Every Airman has a role. Everything, from our newest Airman learning how to swing a hammer, our NCOs leading a small team and planning out a job, to our Senior NCOs who see the big picture and manage all of the specialties required to complete a project."

Kagawa added that it takes a team to complete a project, especially form the "ground up." "Facilities aren't built by one specialist, but requires a team. It starts off with the 'dirt boys' putting in a good foundation, then the structures team who go vertical and put up a shell of a building, to the electrical and the utility specialists who provide power, waste and fresh water. All of these different specialties need to come together in an orderly fashion to produce a finished product."

The building and maintaining of facilities echoes the resiliency programs that facilities like Bellows help to promote. According to Senior Master Sgt. Andre Valentine, 624th Regional Support Group Yellow Ribbon Representative, building and maintaining resiliency is a team effort.

"Now days, coping with anxiety is difficult, especially when it comes to a deployment," said Valentine. "No one really talks about it. Facilities like Bellows are key to building a personal foundation with military members. The foundation starts with taking care of yourself mentally, physically, and spiritually. Once you establish that you can build the structure with family and military support such as the Yellow Ribbon Program which gives the tools to resiliency. I'm glad our team is helping out with Bellows."

According to Chaplain Capt Tamara Rowe of the 647th Air Base Group, post-traumatic stress disorder and other afflictions brought on my military service are life changing which is why the tools of resiliency are vital to overcoming mental, physical and spiritual obstacles.

"I look at all of our Airmen as warriors and like all warriors they get worn down," said Rowe. "It's important that they get the necessary care that they need before they leave and after they come back home. All of our helping agencies are connected and want to find the best care for what the service member needs."

Rowe also added that war and combat changes people, and the tools and resources are key in helping them find the new normal before, during and after their deployment.

"Everyone who goes down range comes home changed," said Rowe. "Sometimes they are physically back home but mentally still down range. My goal is help them to reconnect their mind and their body and to help mend the invisible wounds through reintegration, revitalization, dignity and purpose."

The contribution of 624th CES to Bellows AFS included the repaving of the main road, plumbing and air conditioning repairs, and the construction of a bunk house for other visiting civil engineer units. Their efforts are vital to the advocacy of resiliency and self-maintenance for airmen and their families.

The military offers a magnitude of resources for service members, especially those returning from deployment. Bellows as well as other agencies such as Family Advocacy, Military One Source, the Chaplain Corps, and the Yellow Ribbon Program are all instrumental in military resiliency. It is important to stay connected and to realize that the fight down range doesn't have to be a fight when you get back home, and the 624th CES is helping through their expertise.

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