

Naval Services FamilyLine Celebrates Golden Anniversary

02/19/16

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For 50 years the Naval Services FamilyLine (NSFL) has been empowering Navy families to meet the challenges of a military lifestyle with information, resources and mentoring.

Originally starting out as Naval Services WifeLine in 1965, the NSFL is comprised of a board of volunteer spouses and is located on the Washington Navy Yard in Washington, D.C.

"We are proud of our Sailors, and recognize that their spouses and families serve selflessly alongside them," said Beth Mulloy, the 38th and current NSFL chair. "Our organization continues to exist for the same reasons it was formed a half century ago."

The organization provides information and support to Navy spouses worldwide. Information booklets and a protocol handbook, first developed in the 1960s, have grown to a "Guideline Series" of topics pertinent to service members and their families. They are sent to Fleet and Family Support Centers, spouse clubs, family readiness groups and other organizations upon request. They can also be downloaded from the NSFL website.

Mulloy started volunteering for the organization 15 years ago, and continues to be amazed by the strength of military spouses who offer their time and expertise for the group.

"I have never seen a group of spouses who work so hard," Mulloy said. "Everyone pitches in, and you can call upon them at any time - and they will come!"

NSFL currently operates with 450 volunteers and one part-time office employee, and offers four elements: The Guideline Series, Spouse Courses, COMPASS and CORE online.

Last year NSFL distributed 45,000 publications to fill requests from their customers. Mulloy said one of the reasons the Guidelines are so popular is because they are easy to read and contain valuable, up-to-date information.

Guidelines include an emergency preparedness booklet, Are You Ready?, that provides information on creating a family emergency plan, completing emergency contact cards and compiling an emergency supply kit. There are also Guidelines for spouses of Commanding Officers, Executive Officers, Command Master Chiefs and Chiefs of the Boat. These publications include information regarding deployments, support resources and emergency guidelines to assist spouses in understanding their role as a member of the command support team.

The Command Spouse Leadership Course (CSLC) and the Command Master Chief (CMC)/ Chief of the Boat (COB) Spouse Leadership Course (CMCSLC) are intense one-week, accredited executive level courses for spouses of commanding officers, Command Master Chiefs, COBs and Command Senior Chiefs en route to their first command. Developed by Navy spouses and supported by NSFL since inception, these courses run in conjunction with the leadership course conducted in Newport, R.I.

Spouses attend on official Department of the Navy orders in conjunction with their active-duty spouse's orders to attend the Command Leadership School.

Another course offered at installations worldwide is COMPASS, which is based off the original orientation program for new Navy "wives" and has developed into a very successful program for new spouses. COMPASS is a free, three-day, program coordinated and taught by Navy spouse volunteers. It covers topics including: Relocation and moving, deployments, finances, benefits and services, naval traditions, community resources and communication.

"What makes COMPASS unique is that the information, which is already out there, is being imparted by 'seasoned' Navy spouses," said Rosemary Ellis, current COMPASS Program Director. "Spouses want to help each other, and it's a conduit for those talented women and men to do so."

Participants and mentors go by a first-name-only basis and their spouse's rate or rank is not shared.

"The only reason they are there is because they are married to a Sailor," Ellis said. "That commonality levels the playing field."

Ellis said the program works well because it uses a standardized curriculum touching all aspects of military life. Complimentary babysitting is available, and volunteers provide meals and snacks.

"COMPASS gives participants great comfort that they are not alone," she added.

Over the past year, more than 90 COMPASS courses were offered at 20 locations worldwide, with nearly 1,000 participants.

Ellis reflected it was during her tenure as Chair that the name of the association changed from WifeLine to Naval Services FamilyLine.

"That was quite an interesting transition. It only took 12 years to get it done!" she said. "I had previously worked as a volunteer in the organization, so I knew what Wifeline/Naval Services FamilyLine stood for.

Ellis believes FamilyLine will continue to educate and assist spouses and their families. She said that organization's biggest challenge has always been "getting the word about the many wonderful things our organization has done over the past 50 years. We all have had the goal of reaching out and helping all of our Naval Services spouses and their families.

"I feel that FamilyLine will continue to educate and help our spouses and their families, said Ellis. "The new technologies have helped get the word out about our organization. We need to focus on what we do best while exploring new opportunities to educate and reach those who will benefit from what FamilyLine has to offer."

The fourth component of NSFL is the Continuum of Resources and Education (CORE) program. This is a network of seminars, workshops, classes and people dedicated to empowering the Navy spouse, educating the Navy family and promoting the Navy lifestyle. Its mission is to establish a continuing

workshop series for CO/XO spouses, as well as junior spouses, to enhance and develop leadership skills.

NSFL was created with a \$2,000 grant from the Navy League and the energy of a few Navy spouses. It has grown and flourished due to the dedication of many volunteers through the years and financial support of spouse clubs, base boutique shops, the Navy League, individual donations and corporate donations such as Batelle and USAA.

For more information, or to make a contribution, visit NSFL at www.nsfamilyline.org

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