

Officers Wives Club Disbands

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The Fort Monmouth Officers Wives Club (OWC) hosted its last luncheon on Wednesday, June 9. This marked the end of the Club's seven decades of service to the community.

Past Presidents in attendance included Teresa Moore, 2007-2009; Sheryl Boyd, 2003-2004 and 2006-2007; Saddle Colon, 2001-2002; and Doris Dean, 1999-2001.



Current and past Presidents and Honorary Presidents in attendance included Becky Carpenter, 2009-2010; Teresa Moore, 2007-2009; Sheryl Boyd, 2003-2004 and 2006-2007; Linda Mazzucchi, 2004-2007; Saddle Colon, 2001-2002; Doris Dean, 1999-2001; and Lori Borgna-Strong, 2009-2010.

Past Honorary President Linda Mazzucchi (2004-2007), wife of former CECOM Commander MG Michael R. Mazzucchi, also attended.

Some OWC members in attendance joined the organization in the 1950s. Other attendees drove from as far as Virginia to participate.

Lunch commenced following a welcome by current OWC President Becky Carpenter.

U. S. Military Academy Preparatory School (USMAPS) Commandant, COL Tyge Rugenstein, dropped in while the ladies dined to thank them for the Club's support of USMAPS. This support has included donations to

the USMAPS end of year dinner dance for cadets and their guests, attendance at which reaches well into the hundreds.

Following lunch, OWC member Deb Visconti presented an OWC Patriot Award to Elizabeth Moore, who attends Red Bank Catholic. The Patriot Award recognizes children with active duty military parents, according to Visconti, "to thank them for understanding what it is they need to do to allow their parents to ... support and defend our country." Visconti had previously visited Monmouth Regional High School to publically recognize military children there.

The Club recognized its 2010 scholarship awardees next.

In its last year, the Club raised some \$40,000 in donations for various causes benefiting Soldiers, retirees and their families. This included a \$4,600 donation to “Fort Fest: The Last Hooah,” and some \$20,000 in higher education scholarships to local juniors and seniors.

Traditionally, the OWC granted scholarships only to graduating seniors. This year, the OWC selected winners from the graduating classes of 2010 and 2011 because, according to Carpenter, the Club wanted to be able to offer as many scholarships as possible before the post closed.

The college scholarships committee, comprised of members of the OWC and outside educators, combed application packages for “overall outstanding students,” according to 2011 scholarship committee chairwoman and OWC member Amy Lueders. The committee considered academic performance, extracurricular activities, volunteer service, and work experience.

Applicants also submitted an essay. The essay question for 2010 graduates was, “Passion fuels a desire in life to succeed. What is your passion in life? Is it a sport, academics, volunteer work, a cause or something else?”

2010 scholarship committee chairwoman and OWC member Joanne Backman said of the essays, “I was very impressed with the quality of the answers of our winners. Their answers were very thought provoking and wise beyond their years.”



2010 scholarship winners pictured here included Khadeidra Billingsley, Christina Pico, Elizabeth Moore, Kelly Pace, and Cameron Butler.

The five 2010 scholarship winners included Elizabeth Moore, who earned fifth place. Moore’s passion is change, specifically, “to have the wisdom and the ability to change in order to be able to adapt to different situations... that the military child encounters everyday.” Elizabeth will attend Arizona State University.

Kelly Pace, who attends Red Bank Catholic, won fourth place. Pace’s passion is being the best person she can be. She will attend Catholic University.

Cameron Butler, who attends Monmouth Regional High School, garnered third place. Butler’s passion is patience, focus and determination. He will attend the University of Alabama.

Khadeidra Billingsley, who attends Monmouth Regional High School, achieved second place. Billingsley's passion is to let every human being know how important they are through the true meaning of kindness. She will attend Clark Atlanta University.

Christina Pico, who attends Monmouth Regional High School, won first place. She wrote that in order to achieve success, "one must be able to do more than what is asked or required." Pico will attend the University of Delaware.

2011 scholarship recipients, who did not attend the luncheon, are Natasha Backman, Patrick Rounds, A.J. Visconti, and Erin Pace.

The Fort Monmouth Thrift Store generated much of the OWC scholarship money over the years. According to a 1957 *Monmouth Message* article, the Thrift Store, also called the Thrift Shop, opened its doors in 1947 as an Officers' Wives Club fundraiser for the post nursery. When the nursery proved self supporting, profits from Thrift Shop went instead to various "charitable and social causes."

The Thrift Store closed its doors Thursday, April 22.

Current Honorary President Mrs. Lori Borgna-Strong, wife of CECOM Commander MG Randolph P. Strong, spoke after the scholarship presentations. She relayed how Mrs. Effie Van Deusen, wife of former Fort Monmouth Commander BG George Lane Van Deusen, formally organized the Officers' Wives Club in 1941. Prior to that, many Officers' wives met informally at the ladies homes.

During WWII, the dynamic Mrs. Van Deusen drove ambulances, organized a red cross auxiliary, and helped plan first lady Eleanor Roosevelt's visit to the Army's first mental health clinic, right here at Fort Monmouth.

Once, when Effie received a "woman of the year" award, MG Van Deusen told her benefactors: "why, she's been my 'woman of the year' for years. You're just catching up with me."

Mrs. Borgna-Strong noted, "That's the kind of person who formed this club. I believe that every woman who became a member of this club has shared the same values. Your service as a group will always be remembered as a legacy in the lives and accomplishments of many of our Soldiers and their families, including their children and their children's children...who have benefited from your generosity and dedication."

"I've been privileged to spend this past year with all of you. It has been an honor to build on the proud legacy of the Fort Monmouth Officers Wives Club: seven decades worth of caring, commitment, and service."

According to Carpenter, the Club ended with 70 members. This included the wives of active duty military and civilians, of retired veterans and civilians, and of some foreign liaison officers. Past membership rosters reached into the hundreds.