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Military families to benefit from Lilly Endowment, Purdue partnership

WEST LAFAYETTE, Ind. - An \$8.9 million gift from Lilly Endowment will help a Purdue University institute reach out to military families across the nation and serve as a model for others.

The gift to Purdue's Military Family Research Institute, the only one of its kind in the country, is designed to help military families better adapt to the challenges of repeated deployments and the stresses of raising and connecting with their children during wartime.

"The Endowment's ongoing support of Purdue has been vital in so many critical areas," said Purdue president France A. Córdova. "This latest gift aims to give military families much-needed support. I sincerely thank Lilly Endowment for this gift."



France A. Córdova
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Created in 2000 under an agreement with the Office of Military Community and Family Policy in the Department of Defense, the research institute has worked to study the quality of life of military families.

Shelley MacDermid, a professor of child development and family studies at Purdue and director of the Military Family Research Institute, said the funding will allow the university to expand its study of military members, both during active duty and as they reintegrate into civilian lifestyles after deployment.

While only the 15th most populous state in the country, Indiana ranks fourth in the number of citizens who are part of the National Guard and Reserve. Together, the Guard and Reserve have 18,671 Hoosier members, with 10,092 spouses and 17,870 children.

The three-year gift will focus on three main areas of need for this group, including:

- * Research into the needs and challenges of military families, especially after deployment.

Planned projects include a long-term, in-depth study of National Guard families in the 76th Brigade Combat Team, which is expected to deploy to the Middle East sometime in 2008.

"Without data, advocating for families in the Guard and Reserve is difficult," MacDermid said. "Our hope is to enroll 450 families in the study and follow them through both the deployment and reintegration period when they return from overseas. We need to better understand the unique needs of such families, the stresses both the adults and children face in each stage of military service, and the great resilience many of these families display."

MacDermid said the information collected could help Purdue teach support personnel ways to best address the concerns of soldiers who have children and spouses.

"The composition of our armed forces has changed over time," MacDermid said. "While military members were once primarily single men, our country is increasingly relying on more established citizens who must leave families behind to go to war. This shift in demographics has brought new challenges that must be addressed."

- * Assistance for military family support workers already in place across the state.

A key part of the institute's mission will be to support the paid and volunteer staff already serving military units in Indiana.

"In partnership with faculty who are experts on marriage, parent-child relationships, child development, financial stability and mental health, we plan to offer these family workers all the help we can," MacDermid said.

"The support groups already in place around service members and veterans work tirelessly to assist military families. We hope to provide needed resources on topics that directly affect these units."

- * A plan to reach out to professionals who already work with, treat and provide services for military families in civilian communities.

"Every day doctors, lawyers, child-care providers, benefits coordinators, employers and teachers in communities all around the state interact with

military members or their spouses or children, often without realizing it," MacDermid said. "There is a vast wealth of underutilized knowledge and support available to military members in their own backyard."

The research institute will examine ways to better engage such community members as a larger framework of support for military families.

About \$1.5 million of the grant will create a permanent home for the institute on the Purdue campus. Formerly housed in rented space, the institute will share quarters with the Department of Child Development and Family Studies. The \$11.5 million Bill and Sally Hanley Hall, which will be built beside Fowler House just west of the corner of State Street and Martin Jischke Drive, will expand to include a 3,000-square-foot space dedicated to the Military Family Research Institute.

"Previously, we were housed quite far from campus, making it difficult to create synergies among faculty members interested in our work," MacDermid said. "This space also will allow us to better involve both undergraduate and graduate students by virtually eliminating their travel time."

The Purdue gift is one piece of a larger, four-part initiative from Lilly Endowment, which awarded funds to a variety of groups in Indiana. Other awards include a \$570,000 grant to the Indiana National Guard Relief Fund, a \$9.9 million grant to the Roudebush Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Indianapolis for medical and social services, and \$400,000 to Crane Technology Inc. for the development of a learning and employment center for veterans.

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based, private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly and Co.

In keeping with the wishes of the three founders, Lilly Endowment exists to support the causes of religion, education and community development. The Endowment affords special emphasis to projects that benefit young people and promote leadership education and financial self-sufficiency in the nonprofit, charitable sector.

The Military Family Research Institute, an interdisciplinary research program, was created by the Department of Defense and the Office of Military Community and Family Policy. The institute is part of the Center for Families in the College of Consumer and Family Sciences, which focuses on improving the quality of life for families and strengthening the capacity of families

to provide nurturing environments for their members.

Writer: Tanya Brown, (765) 494-2079,
tanyabrown@purdue.edu

Sources: Shelley MacDermid, (765) 494-6026,
shelley@purdue.edu

Gretchen Wolfram, Lilly Endowment, (317) 916-7304, wolframg@lei.org

Purdue News Service: (765) 494-2096;
purduenews@purdue.edu

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