



# Operation at Ease monthly coordinators are “the glue”

By Kim Sniffin • Photo by John Muuss

“The Glue.” It’s a term college basketball coaches use frequently. It refers to players who set the tone, who get everybody pumped up, who get everyone playing together as a team. At Operation at Ease (OAE), our “Glue” players are our monthly coordinators (MCs).

For those of you not familiar with OAE, we are the 250 or so resident volunteers who annually host 50 military families for three-day weekends at St. James. To qualify for a visit, the military family must have been separated for a substantial part of the past year owing to the service member’s deployment to a combat or hazardous duty area.

Each OAE visit requires a team of volunteers to greet, orient, house, feed, photograph and arrange amenities for our visiting military families. Every volunteer must be up to speed on what’s expected. Some team members are first-timers who need guidance through the process. Material support must be gathered and delivered on time. Schedules have to be coordinated to be sure the visit goes smoothly. It’s the job of the MC to make sure each team is prepared to produce a successful weekend for each of the six or seven warrior families who visit St. James each month.

OAE’s team of 10 MCs — Claudia Lowe, Barbara Griffin, Jeannie Rodbell, Stephanie Palmer, Linda Boston, Julie Hackett, Judy Steffens, Kathy McCulloch, Roseann Summerville and Fran Ventola — have been volunteers with OAE for an average of about six years. Most of them started in a less visible capacity and moved up to

the leadership position of MC when the opportunity arose. All have now been MCs for at least three years.

Claudia Lowe is one of the longest-serving coordinators. She first volunteered with her husband, Garland, to provide boat tours to the families in 2009. She also did kids’ toy buckets for seven years. Tag-teaming with Barbara Griffin, the two became MCs in 2011. Asked why she does so much, Claudia says “Having an opportunity to give back to our military is a privilege and an honor because of their sacrifice for my freedom and blessed life.”



OAE monthly coordinators (l-r) Linda Boston, Claudia Lowe, Barbara Griffin, Kathy McCulloch, Julie Hackett, Judy Stephens, Roseanne Summerville, Fran Ventola, Jeannie Rodbell and Stephanie Palmer

Julie Hackett has been a coordinator since 2014. Julie’s husband was in Vietnam when their first child was born. She says she understands first-hand the sacrifices these families make and is “so glad to have the opportunity to help (them) spend some quality time together.”

Jeannie Rodbell, one of our newest coordinators, managed operations for the month of May this year. Jeannie learned about OAE in 2015 and immediately jumped at the opportunity to become a MC. “The 20 hours of my time are nothing compared to the commitment these soldiers and their families give me, and us, daily.”

All ten coordinators do a fabulous job of organizing, motivating, and leading their teams, setting an amazing example of dedication to OAE’s mission. Please join the OAE Board in recognizing these ladies for the wonderful way they represent our community to the warrior families who visit us at St. James.

