



**Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall
Submission for the Department of the Army's
2014 Maj. Gen. Keith L. Ware Community Relations Award
Category A: Individual Achievement**

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Nominee: Leah Rubalcaba

Army Service Component Command: Installation Management Command

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INTRODUCTION

Nominee: Leah Rubalcaba

Army Service Component Command: Installation Management Command

Leah Rubalcaba, nominee for Community Relations, Category A: Individual Achievement, is Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall's Community Relations Officer, planning, coordinating and directing community relations strategies and programs that promote the understanding of the mission and contributions of Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall (JBM-HH) and its partners to the general public.

Ms. Rubalcaba performs outreach to three main audiences: Washington D.C. (750,000 plus), Arlington County in Northern Virginia (350,000 plus), and military and civilian personnel of the National Capital Region (150,000 plus, to include active duty and reserve component military personnel, retirees, veterans and family members). She develops and maintains relationships with military personnel from the lowest to the highest in rank along with their families and with key civilian personnel, to include Washington DC and Arlington County leaders, businesses, service and civic organizations, and individual residents.

She created the current community relations program, taking the division to a level rich with community outreach events to include annual events such as the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise for military members, wounded warriors and veterans, the Southwest Waterfront Fireworks Festival, the Parade of Lighted Boats, Arlington Neighborhood Day, Arlington County Fair opening ceremony, and Leadership Arlington's closing retreat. She developed and facilitates JBM-HH's quarterly public open houses of Fort McNair's historic Grant Hall third-floor courtroom and, in recent years, has arranged for observances and celebrations of key 100- and 150-year anniversaries, such as the Centennial of Military Aviation, the 100-year anniversary of the original gift of cherry trees from Japan to Washington D.C. (some trees planted at Fort McNair), the 150-year observance of the Washington Arsenal Explosion, and the 150-year anniversary of the start of the military tribunal of those thought responsible for the plot to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln.

Additionally, Ms. Rubalcaba provides protocol guidance and support to the Joint Base Commander and directorates as needed, helping with change of command ceremonies, groundbreakings and ribbon cuttings, and re-dedications of historically significant buildings – requiring her to research and develop programs recounting a building's history.



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PLANNING

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As part of her community outreach for the Fort McNair portion of Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall (JBM-HH), Public Affairs' Community Relations Officer, Leah Rubalcaba, is the Army's liaison to the Washington Waterfront Association (WWA) of Southwest Washington D.C. The WWA is a not-for-profit civic organization comprised of businesses, non-profit and civic organizations, U.S. government agencies, District of Columbia government agencies and residents who live, are located in or with a vested interest in Southwest Washington D.C.

As part of that association, for the past 10 years, Ms. Rubalcaba has worked with the WWA in coordinating the annual Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise held as a thank you to the military. The Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise is hosted by the WWA and Entertainment Cruises of Washington D.C. specifically for area wounded warriors, single service members (all services), and veterans. The cruise takes place on Entertainment Cruises' Odyssey ship and includes a Thanksgiving meal and entertainment as the ship embarks on a 2-hour cruise from the southwest Washington marina, up the Potomac River to Georgetown and back. Everything about the cruise is donated – the ship, the food and the ship's staff donate their time. Members of the WWA volunteer to serve as waiters for the event.

As the military liaison to the WWA, Ms. Rubalcaba has for the past 10 years arranged for the military participation of the cruise. Working through the JBM-HH Command Sergeant Major, word is sent out to all the region's NCOs (all services) and to the single service member organizations to recruit service members to attend the cruise. The invitations are specific – for single service members and geographical bachelor/bachelorettes not going home for Thanksgiving and who do not have family in the area. Ms. Rubalcaba maintains the RSVP list – the seats on the cruise are reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. Ms. Rubalcaba also coordinates the attendance by Wounded Warriors from the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and from the Warrior in Transition Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Va., working with the special event POCs at both locations.

Since parking is at a premium at the waterfront and to help facilitate attendance, Ms. Rubalcaba coordinates bus transportation for attendees (from all the services). The buses board and depart from the Fort Myer side of the Joint Base and deliver the service members to the marina for ship boarding. Following the cruise, the buses pick up the service members at the marina and return them to Fort Myer.

PLANNING: Continued

The service members join veterans from the Armed Forces Retirement Home of Washington D.C., the Disabled American Veterans of Washington D.C.; and Honor Flight Veterans of northern Virginia who are also invited to attend. Service member attendance is annually between 200 and 250, and veterans number about 150.

Ms. Rubalcaba also coordinates participation by the D.C. National Guard's 257th Army Band to play in the ship's first dining room to entertain the veterans. She arranges for a Joint Color Guard to present the Colors and a vocalist to sing the National Anthem at the opening ceremony, and she writes the opening ceremony remarks.

Ms. Rubalcaba spends several months planning and coordinating this annual event and, each year, helps to produce and facilitate a hugely successful event that benefits service members from all services – it is a truly joint event. As a joint base in the National Capital Region, this event serves to further the installation's mission of serving, supporting and enabling a ready and resilient Joint Force.



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RESEARCH

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As part of her research in preparing for the annual Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise, Ms. Rubalcaba works to identify key NCOs, as well as the leaders of the single service member organizations, from the region's service components – to include Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force and Coast Guard – as well as the National Guard. By obtaining the names and emails of these individuals, the official request is sent to them to identify single service members interested in attending the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise.

Ms. Rubalcaba also identifies the points of contact at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and from the Warrior in Transition Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Va., to begin coordination to identify wounded warriors interested in attending the cruise. Ms. Rubalcaba is first required to obtain the official forms to fill out requesting wounded warrior participation, which also require a legal review.

In order to obtain Staff Judge Advocate approvals, Ms. Rubalcaba is required to provide information on the cost of the cruise. The Washington Waterfront Association (WWA) and Entertainment Cruises provide Ms. Rubalcaba with the appropriate break down. In her research, Ms. Rubalcaba has found that everything is donated by the WWA and its members. WWA member Entertainment Cruises of Washington D.C. donates the ship, Entertainment Cruises staff members volunteer to work the luncheon (they don't get paid), WWA members donate their time to be a part of the serving staff and serve the Thanksgiving meal to the guests, and all the food is donated. If a per person dollar value had to be assigned to the food that is served, it would be less than \$10 per person.

Walter Reed and Fort Belvoir also require Ms. Rubalcaba to provide flyers to advertise the event to the wounded warriors.



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IMPLEMENTATION

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A couple of months before the event, Ms. Rubalcaba creates the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise invitation targeting single service members and geographical bachelor/bachelorettes from the region: those not going home for Thanksgiving and who do not have family in the area.

She works with the wounded warrior event coordinators at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., and the Warrior in Transition Battalion at Fort Belvoir, Va., to fill out the necessary forms for legal review and approval of participation by their personnel. As requested, she creates and provides them with invitation/informational flyers to notify those service members about the cruise. Below are copies of the flyers created to notify wounded warriors of the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise opportunity:

**Special Invitation for
Wounded, Ill and Injured and their Families
from Walter Reed National Military Medical Center Bethesda
to attend the**

2014 THANKSGIVING LUNCHEON CRUISE
onboard the Odyssey Cruise Ship
Tuesday, 25 Nov 2014
Ship boarding 1100, Washington Marina, 600 Water Street SW
Luncheon Cruise 1200-1400
Cruise the Washington Channel, up the Potomac River and back




- Enjoy a delicious Thanksgiving meal
- Musical entertainment in two dining areas
- Waterworks sendoff by a D.C. Fireboat
- Breathtaking views of Washington landmarks from the river
- Sign up at Events Office, Bldg 62, 1st Deck






**Special Invitation for
Wounded, Injured and Ill Warriors and their Families
from The Warrior Transitions Units at Fort Belvoir
to attend the**

2014 THANKSGIVING LUNCHEON CRUISE
onboard the Odyssey Cruise Ship
Tuesday, 25 Nov 2014
Ship boarding 1100, Washington Marina, 600 Water Street SW
Luncheon Cruise 1200-1400
Cruise the Washington Channel, up the Potomac River and back




- Enjoy a delicious Thanksgiving meal
- Musical entertainment in two dining areas
- Waterworks sendoff by a D.C. Fireboat
- Breathtaking views of Washington landmarks from the river






IMPLEMENTATION: Continued

On the day of the event, Ms. Rubalcaba arranges for members of the Public Affairs staff to oversee bus boarding at Fort Myer beginning at 10:00 a.m. As the service members board the buses, their names are checked off the list of confirmed participants and they are given their cruise ticket. The buses depart for the marina at 10:30 a.m. with the Public Affairs staff members serving as POCs on the buses.

Ms. Rubalcaba mans a table next to the boarding ramp to the Odyssey ship at the marina beginning at 10:00 a.m. to check off the names of confirmed service personnel who make their own way to the marina and hands them their cruise tickets. Tickets are also handed out from this table to the veterans as they arrive for the cruise. Ship boarding takes place from 10:30 a.m. until just before the ship pushes back at 12:00 noon.

After the buses from JBM-HH arrive at the marina, the Public Affairs staff members serve as reinforcements at the check-in table, and at 11:30 a.m., Ms. Rubalcaba makes her way to ship's main dining room where the opening ceremony takes place. She oversees and facilitates the details of the ceremony. Welcome remarks are made by Entertainment Cruises' vice president and general manager. The Joint Color Guard presents the colors, and the vocalist sings the National Anthem. After the Colors are retreated, a Navy Chaplain provides the invocation.



With everyone onboard and seated, the Odyssey ship pushes back at exactly 12:00 noon for the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise. Ms. Rubalcaba also arranges for a staff photographer and reporter to be onboard to take photos of the event, to live Tweet and to cover the event for a story in the base newspaper, The Pentagongram.

As the ship makes its way out of the Washington Channel, the volunteer servers serve the meal which consists of a salad starter, followed by the turkey entrée with traditional Thanksgiving fixings, and finishing with dessert. The Odyssey makes its way to the Potomac River from the Washington Channel and heads north past the Washington D.C. monuments and landmarks, such as the Kennedy Center and Watergate Hotel, to the District's Georgetown area. There, the ship turns around for its return trip.



IMPLEMENTATION: Continued

The veterans, seated in the first dining room, enjoy the music of a combo from the D.C. National Guard's 257th Army Band. The ship's D.J. (who also volunteers his time) plays music in the second dining room, where the service members get up and dance once they have finished eating.



Personnel also get the opportunity to enjoy the cruise and take photos from outside deck vantage point, which completely surrounds the Odyssey ship. As the ship leaves the Washington Channel, one of the fireboats from the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department's Harbor Patrol provides a sendoff by shooting water 70 feet into the air. Harbor Patrol also provides the Odyssey with a police escort for the duration of the cruise.



At the end of the cruise, the Odyssey returns and docks at the southwest Washington marina at exactly 2:00 p.m. Attendees are given complimentary photos taken of them when they boarded the ship. They are also given a sweet treat, such as warm cookies, as they make their way off the ship.

When the ship docks, the buses from Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall are already staged on the street next to dock – ready for the service members to re-board. Once the service members have boarded, the buses transport them back to Fort Myer – the culmination of yet another successful Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise.



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EVALUATION

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Ms. Rubalcaba spends several months planning and coordinating the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise and, each year, helps to produce and facilitate a hugely successful event that benefits service members from all services – it is a truly joint event. As a joint base in the National Capital Region, this event serves to further JBM-HH's mission of serving, supporting and enabling a ready and resilient Joint Force.

JBM-HH Joint Base Commander Col. Michael H. Henderson noted after the 2014 cruise held Nov. 25: "This cruise is a perfect example of an event that can only be hosted here in the National Capital Region - bringing together service members from all branches of our services, alongside wounded warriors and our veterans. It was a tremendous way to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday."

Each year, following the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise, the Washington Waterfront Association (WWA) and JBM-HH Public Affairs receive emails of thanks from service members who attended the event and from moms whose son or daughter was just assigned to the region and who would be alone for the Thanksgiving holiday.

SSG Abigail Evangelista, Executive Assistant with the White House Communications Agency, expressed her thanks:

"This was an excellent opportunity. I had never been on this type of cruise before, since Soldiers can't really afford it. The food was excellent – all three courses. And I loved having the food served instead of having to stand in line. I especially liked the warm chocolate chip cookies they gave us as we exited the ship and the free souvenir photos. It was really worth it."

"A proud Air Force Mom" Leticia Parra sent this message:

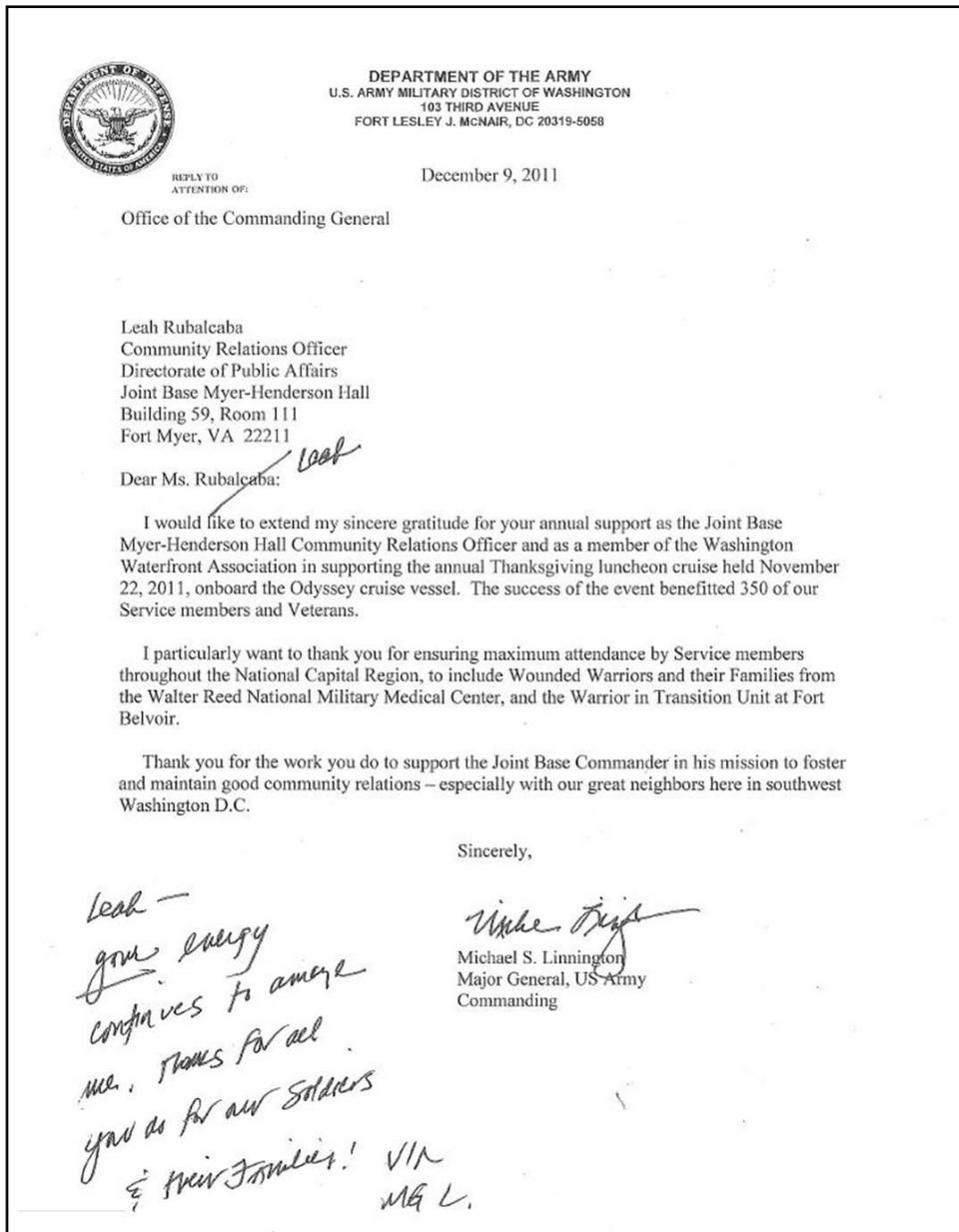
"I don't know where to begin. I am a mom, a Very Proud Mom of a Air Force 1st Class Airman!!! I want to Thank You for the wonderful time he had on your Odyssey Cruise. He texted, 'It was awesome, the Phood was really awesome, it was an awesome surprise.' Yes he is an impressionable young man. I love that you helped him have a Fantastic time!! This means the world to me. Especially for Thanksgiving, a time when all ... or most families are together giving Thanks."

EVALUATION: Continued

Ms. Rubalcaba forwarded a copy of Mrs. Parra's message to the JBM-HH command group, to which then JBM-HH CSM Earlene Lavender replied:

"That was too AWESOME; that really made my Thanksgiving for someone to reach out to their parents about their day - normally young people do open up. Great message and thanks for sharing - you made it all possible. Thanks Leah!!!"

Another example of a positive evaluation was a letter sent to Ms. Rubalcaba by then Maj. Gen. Michael Linnington, Commanding General of the U.S. Military District of Washington, following the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise held in 2011:



Working jointly with the WWA and Entertainment Cruises also serves to further the Army's and Joint Base Commander's mission of fostering and strengthening good community relations and partnerships. This has been a long and fruitful partnership – for ten years – that has benefitted both service members and veterans and has strengthened the bonds with community partners in southwest Washington D.C.

EVALUATION: Continued

David Johnson, WWA board member and Entertainment Cruises manager, has commented on why Entertainment Cruises offers the Odyssey cruise ship year after year for the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise:

“It is our absolute honor to help host this event year after year. It is a token of our appreciation to the men and women who are serving and to those who have served. It is the least we can do for their service and sacrifices.”

Johnson also noted:

“It is the members of the Washington Waterfront Association, working together with our partners from the armed forces and our own staff who volunteer and donate their time, who make this work. It is also all the local and national food vendors who donate the food product for the Thanksgiving meal who make this work. It is a team effort and a ‘feel good’ for everyone. Ultimately, it is all about the service members and the veterans – that is who we do this for.”

The members of the WWA – a not-for-profit organization made up of businesses, non-profit and civic organizations, U.S. government agencies, District of Columbia government agencies and residents who live, are located in or with a vested interest in Southwest Washington D.C. – look forward to this event every year, because – as they state – they are inspired by and it gives them the opportunity to interact with active duty military personnel, wounded warriors and veterans.

Washington Waterfront Association member and former WWA president Nancy Lain commented:

“It is so wonderful to be able to spend time with both the older veterans and the young active duty service members. We do this (the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise) as a small token of our appreciation to the men and women of our military – to those who are serving and to those who have served. It’s a thank you for their commitment and sacrifices and that of their families. Their commitment is huge!”

WWA members are influential members of Washington D.C. and the southwest Washington community – and through their efforts – they make substantial contributions throughout the year to the Department of Defense at a number of events, to include the Thanksgiving Luncheon Cruise. They are instrumental in spreading the word and raising public awareness about the close partnership between southwest Washington D.C., the WWA and the military in the National Capital Region.

Supporting Documentation URLs:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jbm-hh/sets/72157649419140296/>

<http://www.dcmilitary.com/article/20141204/NEWS10/141209934/0/search>